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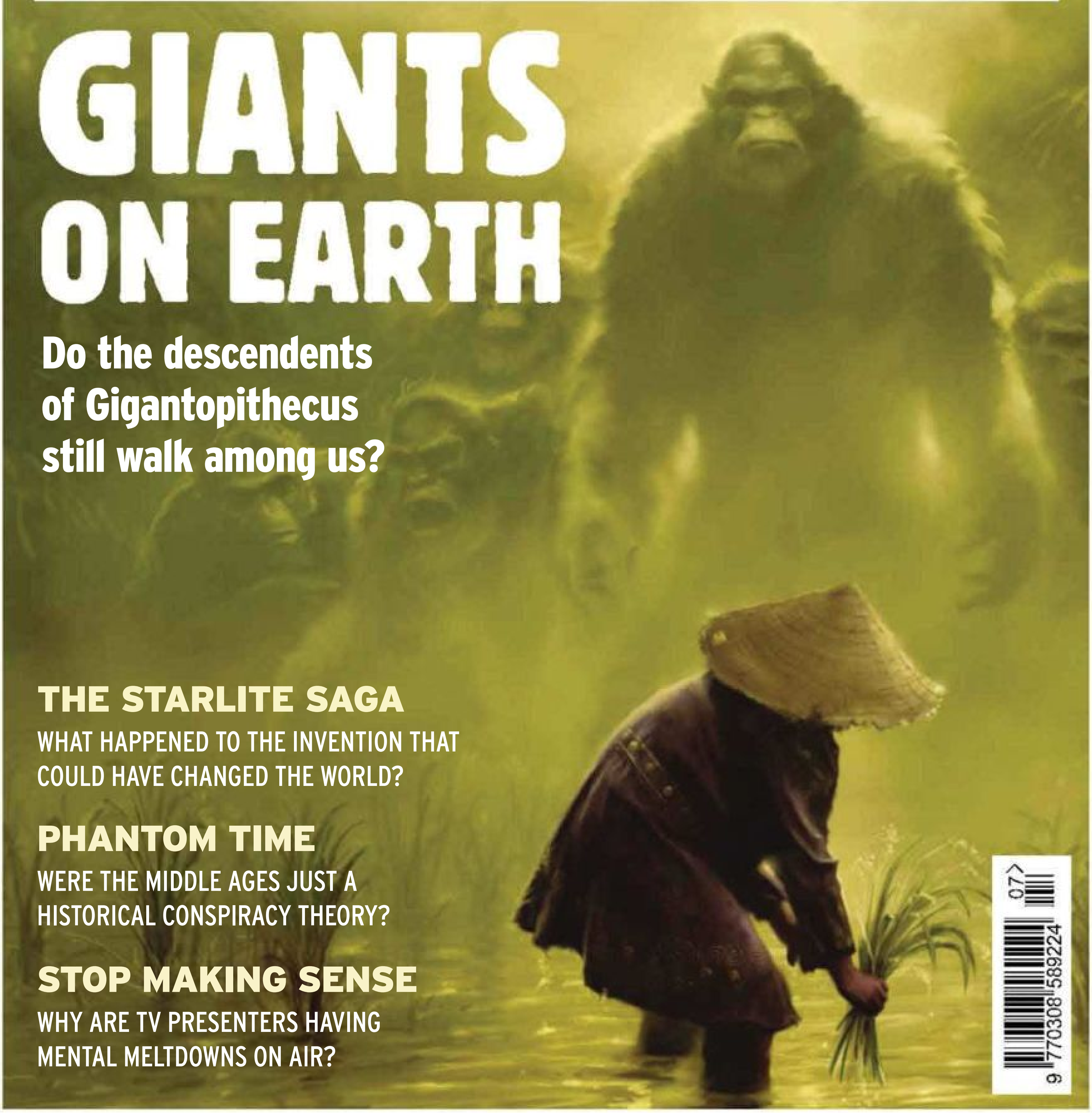

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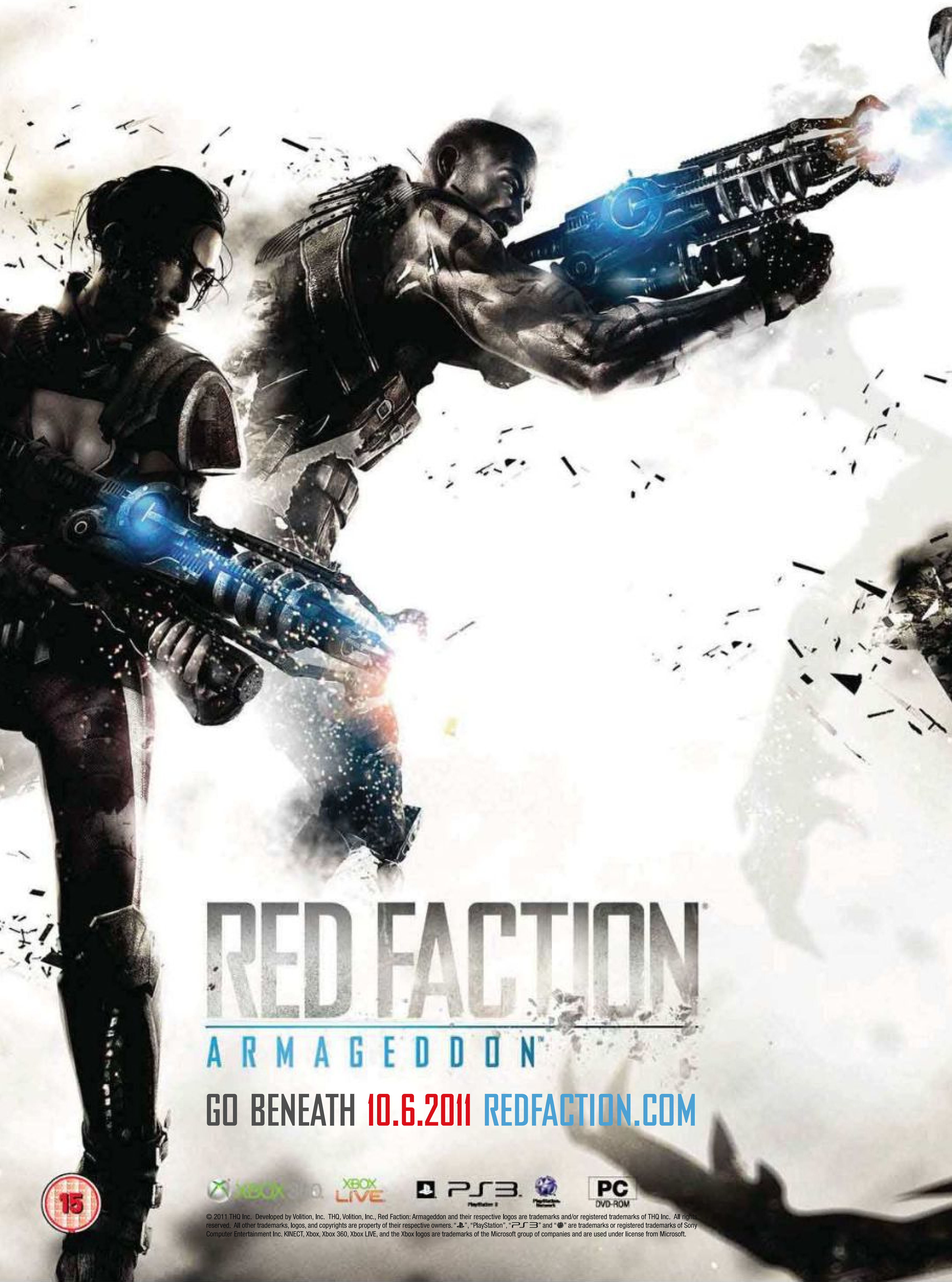
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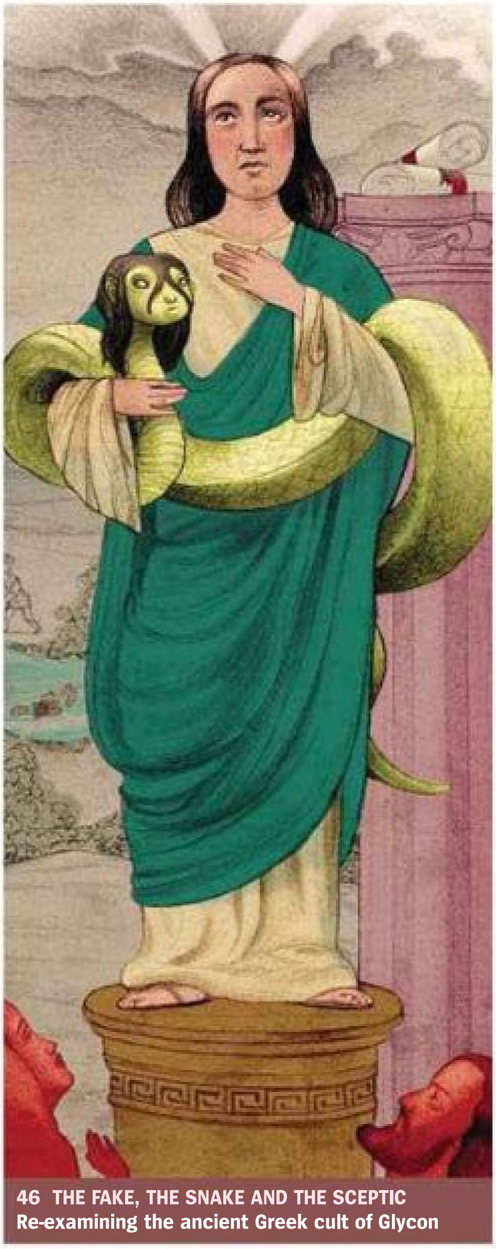

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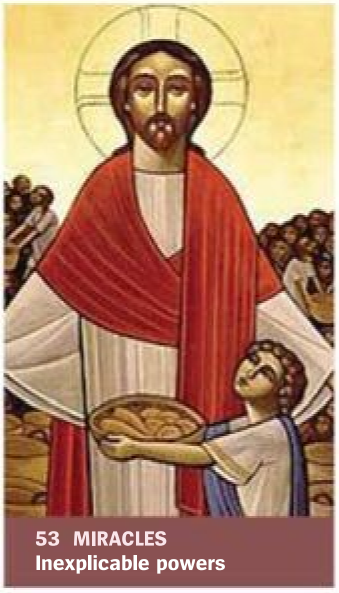

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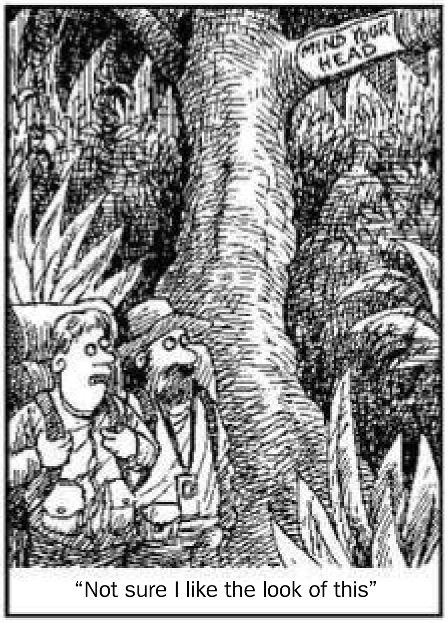
editorial

We're all paranoid now...

The last weekend in April started with the Royal Wedding, at which some, including George Filer of the National UFO Center, expected flying saucers to perform a fly-past (*aolnews.com, 30 March 2011*); in the event, we had to make do with the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight. The same weekend ended even more momentously with President Obama's announcement that Osama bin Laden, America's Public Enemy Number One since he vanished into thin air following the 9/11 attacks, had been killed by US Navy SEALs.

Case closed, at last? Not when statements from the White House appeared to offer quite contradictory accounts of what had really taken place in Abbottabad, the old hill station that was the target of this extrajudicial US incursion into sovereign Pakistani territory. And especially not when it became clear that there wasn't a body, or even a photograph of a body, to be seen. Thoughts of Hitler's death (announced on the same day 66 years earlier, if you were in the US) and the subsequent, long-running fallout sprang to mind; as Peter Oborne wrote in the *Spectator* (7 May), it was obvious we were going to need "a new Hugh Trevor-Roper" to disentangle fact from fiction.



"Not sure I like the look of this"

MARTIN ROSS

Except, in an Internet age like ours, we're more likely to get a multitude of conspiracy theorists tapping away at their keyboards and further muddying already murky waters. You'd think that after a decade of the 9/11 'truth' campaign and years of questions about his own birth certificate (finally produced in long form in response to the media frenzy whipped up by would-be Republican Presidential candidate Donald Trump) that President Obama would know better.

The great surge of suspicion greeting Obama's announcement (see pp8–9 for an account of the various conspiracy theories on offer) should at least be a reminder to world leaders of the dangers of appearing to act arbitrarily and without regard for the due process of law. Simply being the voice of authority is no longer enough; what with 24-hour news, WikiLeaks, Freedom of Information legislation and the public's belief in its right to know pretty much everything, secrets are hard to keep and genies hard to put back in bottles. Distrust of 'official' secrecy and a drive for openness is no longer just a fringe activity and the old stereotype of tinfoil-hatted crazies sitting alone in dark rooms will have to be discarded as conspiracy theory continues its march into the mainstream; we're all paranoid now.

... But some are more paranoid than others

Having said that, recent research from the University of Kent suggests that some of us are more likely to buy into conspiracy theories than others. Dr Karen Douglas and Dr Robbie Sutton's paper for the *British Journal of Social Psychology*, suggests that those of a Machiavellian bent – those, in other words, more likely to *participate* in a notional conspiracy – are more likely to take conspiracy theories seriously. While this idea doesn't necessarily contradict the widely-held belief, frequently trotted out by the mainstream media, that conspiracy believers are usually the undereducated, disenfranchised and disempowered, it does offer a new twist by suggesting that such people are also projecting their own moral and behavioural norms onto the supposed conspirators. http://bit.ly/lWMsN5 (kent.ac.uk).

UnCon and Emerson

We're dusting off our own tinfoil hats in readiness for the wonderful weekend that will be UnConvention 2011. Plans are well underway – see p17 for further info about the dates, venue and tickets – and we'll be announcing speakers next issue, so watch this space.

Meanwhile, those in search of prime fortean entertainment are pointed to the website of our own Hunt Emerson (largecow.com), where they can buy our resident cartoonist's first foray into the world of popular music. On this new recording of the John Otway classic 'Josephine', the phenomenomical Mr Emerson can be heard singing and playing the guitar (!) alongside Andrew Cowen and Stately Homes of England.

The CD (containing six different mixes) is a mere £5, the CD plus four signed prints is £15, and for those with deep pockets there's even a super-duper *extremely* limited edition for £100. Go on; you know you want one.

DAVID SUTTON
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Why fortean?
Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!
SEE PAGE 78

“All sorts of scandals, and one great crime...”

THE DARK ANGEL

A sensual and stylish adaptation of *Uncle Silas*, Sheridan le Fanu’s influential Victorian literary masterpiece, this three-part drama is elegantly directed by cult favourite Peter Hammond (*Sherlock Holmes*, *The Avengers*). Starring Peter O’Toole in a wonderfully rich performance as the dangerous, scheming and perhaps quite mad Silas Ruthyn, Beatie Edney as the unfortunate Maud, Jane Lapotaire as the grotesquely sinister Madame de la Rougierre, Tim Woodward as the brutal Dudley and Hammer Horror doyenne Barbara Shelley in her final dramatic television role. Sparkling with corrupted elegance, its dark, brooding atmosphere makes *The Dark Angel* the definitive adaptation of this literary classic.

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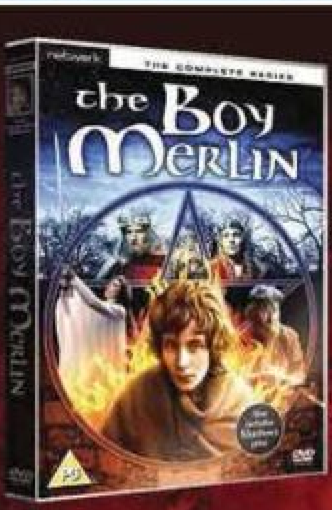
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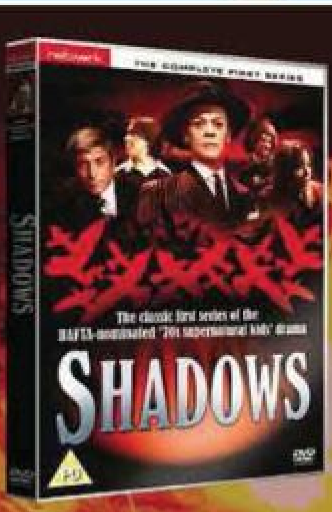
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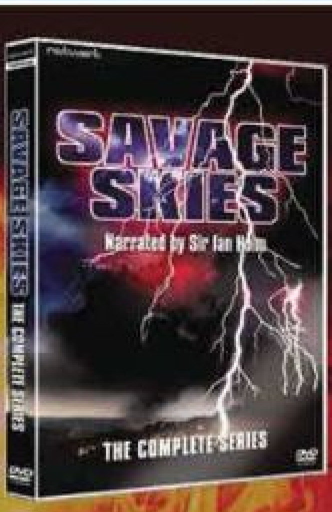
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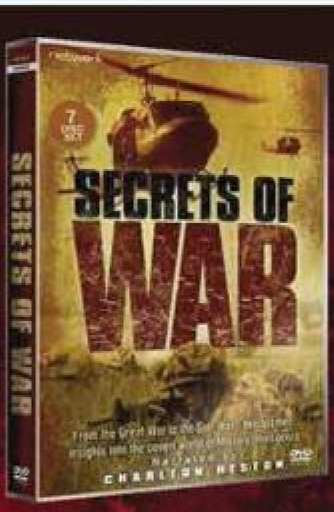
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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

strangedays

Stop making sense

A spate of mental meltdowns by US television presenters has become an Internet sensation. ANGELA KENNEDY investigates.

While discussing military action in Libya last March, Mark McAllister of Global Toronto News in Canada informed viewers: "Now a eye Defence Minister Ab McCain um McLoud did confirm today that more than sifty four 18 fighter jets are spending about as much as 20 and ready to assist the 600 ah uh a hundred deployed over the annount needed now it did a in depend that how the no lan were merge is are an while the you university or the UN mizz mission as whole received support from all patteries in the hues of the garbons uh at of today excuse me I'll have handed it back to you…" His employers later confirmed there had been no problem with the autocue.

Cases of TV presenters spouting drivel may not seem anything out of the ordinary but, in a rash of recent incidents, it was the bizarre delivery (rather than the content) of several televised news reports that provoked comment. Seasoned public speakers displayed an alarming degree of sustained speech impediment and sported looks of outright terror on their faces. The phenomenon sparked a frenzy of online discussion about the possible cause. Naturally, conspiracy theorists wore out their keyboards disseminating suspicions that the verbal disintegrations were linked to US military mind-control or microwave weapon testing. Beyond belief, perhaps, but four, possibly five, cases so close together certainly count as an anomalous occurrence and invite a second glance.

The most sensational case of indiscriminate babble to hit the headlines was in February, during a post-Grammy Awards report by Serene Branson, a Los Angeles correspondent for TV network CBS. Her presentation began as normal with no outward sign anything was amiss, but rapidly descended into garbled and random syllables, with an expression of fear on her face that was painful to watch. She persevered for about 10 seconds before being taken off-air. Neither Branson nor McAllister, both in their thirties, had any medical history of this type of attack.

SAY AGAIN? Serene Branson's report on the Grammy Awards surprised pop fans.

SPLASH NEWS / KCBS

And on 30 March, America's favourite TV judge, Judy Sheindlin, fell prey to the garbled speech syndrome while filming her courtroom reality show, the most watched programme on US daytime TV. At 68, she is older than the previous two victims, but viewers of her razor-sharp dispensing of justice will know she's hardly in her dotage. The cause of her impeded speech and double vision proved a mystery to doctors.

An earlier case occurred in January when Sarah Carlson, presenter on a Wisconsin TV channel, was unable to form her words on-air in an episode that appeared similar to Branson and McAllister. Carlson had suffered from seizures in the past, so most people attributed this glitch to her medical condition. However, the earliest recent instance of anomalous verbal meltdown came from Arizona Governor Jan Brewer at the start of a televised debate in September 2010. This case differed slightly from the other four because, instead of just garbling her words, she interspersed long pauses with hysterical laughter – but the effect of making the speaker look unstable and out of control was the same. She was reading from a rehearsed speech.

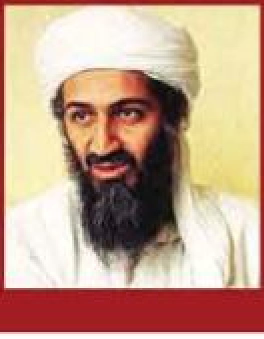
The presenter was unable to form her words on-air

Dramatically inclined bloggers immediately began asserting that the mask had finally slipped and the plot of John Carpenter's 1988 film *They Live* would become reality, with the media and politicians being revealed as world-dominating aliens with skull heads.

However, the more rationally minded Internet sleuths questioned why a report on the Grammys and Judge Judy might be the prime targets of sinister forces. Or perhaps it was a test-drive for the (late) Osama's latest weapon of mass mind-destruction? After all, if the people in power couldn't string a sentence together, then they wouldn't be able to order the invasion of anywhere (George W Bush excepted).

But even the wildest of Internet assertions may have a basis in truth. Research into mind-control by the US military, using drugs, hypnosis and experimentation on human subjects, is documented in the MK-ULTRA paper,[1] so the idea that US authorities have developed techniques to manipulate targets into nonsensical outpourings, thus discrediting them, is nothing new. Additionally, it is claimed scientists at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research have discovered how to pulse microwave signals to stimulate the brain with false sounds and even images, which would likely produce a mental breakdown in the victim. It was also widely reported that non-lethal, directed energy (microwave) weapons were issued to troops in 2010 for use in Afghanistan, but were withdrawn without being used militarily.[2]

More likely explanations for the strange verbal episodes are medically based. Doctors have suggested that Branson, McAllister and Carlson suffered a stroke or migraine on-air.[3] However, none of the three slurred their words or showed signs of facial droop – common stroke symptoms. A trans-



OBAMA VS OSAMA

Bin Laden death brings rumours and conspiracies

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GETTY IMAGES / RICHARD KENDALL

RAIN OF WORMS

Scottish school sportsground showered with slithery critters

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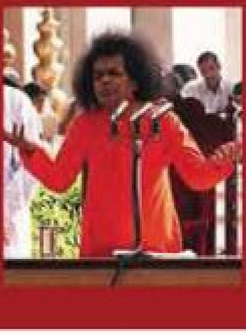
GETTY IMAGES / AFP / TEKEE TANWAR



SAI BABA MOURNED

Indian sect leader was a saint with a vast following

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THEY LIVE: Some viewers were reminded of John Carpenter's 1988 SF/horror movie.

REX FEATURES / COURTESY EVERETT COLLECTION

ient ischæmic attack (TIA) is an alternative plausible theory. TIAs are mini-strokes that cause speech disruption and – essentially – can occur in young people who have never shown symptoms before, whereas full-blown strokes are more prevalent in the over-50s.

Another medical, but no less intriguing, explanation is the mental condition known as "word salad", in which sufferers speak a random jumble of words arranged in phrases that appear to carry meaning but are actually nonsensical – much like the Branson, McAllister and Carlson cases. Word salad is linked to damage to the Wernicke area of the brain, the part controlling language.

Another curious speech phenomenon is the condition known as Latah, said to be a cultural phenomenon in Malaysia and Indonesia, where an "exaggerated startle response" is triggered in victims, often deliberately. The suggestible subjects then appear to lose control of their speech and talk gibberish. [Editor's note: However, Robert E Bartholomew, author of *Exotic deviance: medicalizing cultural idioms from strangeness to illness* (University Press of Colorado 2000), has convincingly argued that latah is an imaginary mental disorder created by Western colonialist intellectuals faced with unfamiliar codes of conduct, that was written into textbooks and became accepted as reality.]

One suggested culprit was damage to brain function from the TV presenters' wireless microphone packs; or perhaps such incidents get noticed more often due to the proliferation of digital recording. But I believe that TIA is the most plausible explanation, although such a concentrated succession of cases among public figures remains anomalous.

NOTES

1 http://nyti.ms/gJbkil (nytimes.com).

2 http://bbc.in/lQVCJ1 (BBC); http://bit.ly/9XVQgn (dailymail.co.uk).

3 Branson's and McAllister's doctors said they had suffered 'migraine auras' that impaired their speech, while the reasons for Sheindlin and Brewer's meltdowns have not been disclosed.

VIDEOS

Serene Branson: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZJ4shANmIN8

Mark McAllister: www.youtube.com/watch?v=0tHUJPbl_ws

Sarah Carlson: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pc4LI0BZ5qU

Jan Brewer: www.youtube.com/watch?v=xUPKKbmWMZ8

Judge Judy Sheindlin: no recording released to date.

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Hobbit could be moving to eastern Europe

Guardian, 28 Sept 2010.

Ghost village sale shows off Spain's demise

Independent, 18 Dec 2010.

Moss is dropped by Vikings

USA Today, -- Nov 2010.

Russian fired gun at banana

Cambridge News, 10 Dec 2010.

Dalek bins aid gardeners to save planet

Newark Advertiser, 28 Aug 1992.

Boiling frogs as relevant as ever

Modern Railways, May 2010.

Sheriff: Fish wanted for stealing boat batteries

mooresvilleweekly.com, 22 Oct 2010.

Authorities in China tighten grip on bishops

Catholic Herald, 10 Dec 2010.

Pantomime dame accused of contravening Geneva Convention

STV TV, 7 Jan 2011.

The bin Laden conspiracies

Is the man behind the 9/11 attacks really dead or just locked up in Area 51?

DEBT LIKELY TO BE GREATEST TOPIC
BIN LADEN IS DEAD
SEPHORA

GETTY IMAGES / AFP / TIMOTHY A CLARY

LEFT: Jubilant Americans celebrate in New York's Times Square.

The announcement that Osama bin Laden had been killed touched off an explosion of conspiracy theory. The summary execution and swiftly disposed-of body, the seeming lack of evidence, and the changing account of events over the days that followed, fuelled speculation – not just within conspiracy forums but across social media and traditional news outlets – that the raid was a hoax: bin Laden was still alive, or he was already dead, or had never really existed at all.

Even if the White House story was essentially true, then it still prompted questions about the motivation behind the raid. Was it a desperate attempt by President Obama to shore up his failing popularity, an excuse to attack Pakistan, an internal al-Qaeda coup, or an Illuminati sacrifice? Whatever the truth, what's certain is that the affair has propelled conspiratorial thinking even further into the mainstream.

The US arguments for its actions are not unconvincing: no country wanted to accept responsibility for the body; Islamic law demands burial within 24 hours; there was a risk of creating a shrine; bin Laden was identified at the scene and by DNA; releasing gruesome death photos would be morally wrong and provoke reprisals; plus, as House Intelligence Committee chairman Mike Rogers pointed out: "Conspiracy theorists around the world will just claim the photos are doctored anyway."

But the White House's handling of events has left it looking shifty and sinister. As *FT*'s conspiracy expert, Robin Ramsay, marvelled: "Given the enormous political trouble caused for President Obama by conspiracy theories about his birthplace, it is surprising that he has agreed to the secret disposal of the body, something guaranteed to give conspiracy theorists a field day."

And then there's the matter of the death photos. After three days of confusion, during which various senators announced that they would be released, and a fake did the rounds, Obama announced that they wouldn't be, on the grounds of a moral squeamishness evidently new to the White House since the public parading of graphic photos of Saddam's dead sons Uday and Qusay, and of Mullah Dadullah, the Taliban's chief military commander. The decision deepened suspicions: as right-wing radio host Chuck Booms exclaimed: "We need the picture… Without the picture, it's going to make people like me think maybe they actually did throw a bag over his head and get him down to Club Gitmo and let Jack Bauer have at him with some jumper cables." Without this photo – and ignoring the DNA evidence which, as Fox News's Steve Doocy pointed out, to those disinclined to believe is "just numbers on a piece of paper" – we were left having to rely on the President's word.

And the President's word was proved unreliable when the official account of the raid changed. Bin Laden was armed; then he wasn't. He used his wife as a human shield; then he didn't; and the only explanation we were offered was a cut-off in the live feed from the compound and the 'fog of war'. Obama had, it seemed, wrested defeat from victory and with his 'death hoax' spawned a new breed, the 'deathers' or 'proofers', to swell the legions of 'truthers' and 'birthers' arrayed against him.

> **It was claimed that bin Laden had never really existed**

It's not just swivel-eyed Republicans who doubted the official version of events. A YouGov-Cambridge University poll found that 66 per cent of Pakistanis believed the man killed was not bin Laden. In Abbottabad, residents were widely sceptical that he could have been living in their midst for six years, particularly without the Pakistani government knowing about it. *Spiegel* interviewed a local merchant, Maqbool Shah, who told them, "Our army and our intelligence service can't be that stupid. No, it was clearly not bin Laden." The *LA Times* reported that in Pakistan's tribal areas, where anti-Western sentiment is particularly strong, many simply refused to believe he could have been killed.

So if he wasn't dead, where was he? Perhaps the Navy SEALs made a mistake and the man they killed was a double; but then that doesn't account for the DNA evidence, the testimony of his family, the convincing details. Or perhaps they kidnapped him and even now are torturing him into confessing his every secret; when they're finished, they'll just dump the body somewhere. "*iamfrank*", a lone voice in an otherwise sober discussion on the *FT* message boards, insisted bin Laden "would have been given a knockout drug and covered in blood to make it look like he was dead to anyone around with prying eyes, he would then have been taken to where else but the only place on the planet where you can't get anywhere near – AREA 51."

According to US conspiracist-in-chief Glenn Beck, bin Laden was captured in order to interrogate him about the whereabouts of al-Qaeda's supposed nuclear bomb (or, alternatively, killed in order to stop the secret leaking out).

Even more imaginative, a hardcore of conspiracy heads speculated that bin Laden was in fact still among us cunningly disguised as… President Obama. Look how similar their names are! And if you type "Osama is Obama" into YouTube you'll find plenty of people desperate to show you, with the aid of some basic photo editing software, that they look identical too.

These clips range from simple photoshopped pictures of Obama in a turban and beard, to short films which overlay photos of the two men and provide insightful commentary along the lines of "Have they not just given this man a shave?"

An opposing school of thought argued that bin Laden couldn't have been killed in Abbottabad because he was in fact already dead. Bin Laden has suffered many deaths in the popular imagination: in 2001, from a lung complaint or kidney failure; in 2005, in the

Pakistan earthquake; in 2007, at the hands of Pakistani militant Omar Sheikh; and on various occasions in firefights in the Tora Bora mountains. The White House, naturally, kept his death a secret in order to continue its war on terror. In an interview on the *Alex Jones Show* following Obama's "got him" announcement, Steve Pieczenik, who served four administrations in international crisis management roles (and is a successful novelist), stated that bin Laden died in 2001 from marfan syndrome and that 9/11 was a 'false flag' operation. Alex Jones, a truther and conspiracist, has also claimed that the White House has been keeping bin Laden's corpse on ice for years, ready to produce at some politically opportune later date – a remarkably generous gift from Bush to his Democrat successor.

The al-Qaeda announcement, five days after the event, that bin Laden had indeed been killed, largely saved Obama from the 'death hoax' accusations; for all but the most determinedly suspicious it was now proved beyond reasonable doubt that the Navy SEALs had got their man.

But questions remain; chiefly, why was the raid launched? There's a vocal contingent in the States which holds that the whole thing was simply a Machiavellian attempt to further the selfish interests of the President. *Fox News*'s political and legal analyst Andrew Napolitano, for example, claimed Obama killed bin Laden to save his "lousy presidency" and sneak another term, a view widely shared on conservative message boards. Birthers, meanwhile, argue it was a ruse to deflect attention from the 'debate' about Obama's background. They point to the timing of the announcement's broadcast, cutting into *Celebrity Apprentice*, and claim its intention was to humiliate Donald Trump, who had called repeatedly for the publication of Obama's birth certificate; it also came a day before their case against Obama's eligibility for the presidency was to be heard in the appeals court, a coincidence they view as deeply suspect.

The killing has also been seen as a means to further various policy aims, both at home and abroad. As with 9/11, posters on sites like Alex Jones's InfoWars believe the raid was staged in order to justify a security crackdown; others cast it as a prelude to foreign aggression, most probably against Pakistan. Pieczenik claims Obama's intention was to isolate Pakistan as punishment for opposing the drone programme. David Icke, characteristically looking for the bigger picture, sees it as an excuse to invade Pakistan, followed by war with China, then Russia. Many Pakistanis also fear invasion: the Urdu daily *Ausaf* reported a former military source as saying "Bin Laden has been killed somewhere else… but since the US intends to extend the Afghan war into Pakistan, and accuse Pakistan, and obtain a permit for its military's entry into the country, it has devised the [assassination] scenario."

RIGHT: The ultimate public enemy – or CIA agent – Osama bin Laden.

Rather than an excuse for invasion, some see the perceived attack on Pakistan as a face-saving mission, a way to shift the blame on to Pakistan for bin Laden's long evasion of America's finest while simultaneously ending the hunt and so justifying withdrawal from Afghanistan; Obama is, after all, under fire for the budget deficit. The *Daily Telegraph* quotes Shakil Ahmed, a pharmaceutical company worker who lived near bin Laden's compound, as saying, "The US wants to quit Afghanistan. They are saying Osama is dead so they can have an excuse. They have tried to defame the Pakistani army by cooking up this story." Paul Craig Roberts, however, writes on rense.com that although he initially suspected bin Laden was killed as an excuse to withdraw from Afghanistan, he now believes "[T]he agenda might be to give Americans a piece of war victory in order to boost their lagging enthusiasm".

Taliban sympathisers on the Islamic Awakening forum accuse the Pakistani military of being in cahoots with the US, keeping bin Laden prisoner as part of some secret deal. This line of theorising was given a boost by the recent revelation that the US had a long-standing, secret agreement with Pakistan: the US could conduct a unilateral mission inside Pakistan's borders to get bin Laden; Pakistan would protest but not stop them.

Then there are the more extravagant conspiracies. It has long been maintained, for instance, among those who lurk in the darker corners of the Internet, that bin Laden was in fact trained up by the CIA for the Afghan fight against the Ruskies in the Eighties; since then he's been a US puppet, or even a CIA agent dressed up as a bloodthirsty Islamic terrorist leader, an excuse for America's war on terror. This kind of argument has particular traction in Iran, demonised by America's attack on Islam but no fans of the Sunni bin Laden either. Ismail Kosari, a member of the Iranian Security and Foreign Policy Commission, called bin Laden "a puppet controlled by the Zionist regime in order to present a violent image of Islam after the 9/11 attacks"; another member of the commission, Javad Jahangirzadeh, claimed bin Laden helped the US fake terrorist attacks and was killed to stop him spilling this secret.

An alternative theory contends that the raid was in fact part of an Egyptian plot: an unnamed source allegedly told Saudi newspaper *al-Watan* that bin Laden's number two, Ayman al-Zawahiri, turned him in so that Egyptians could seize control of Al-Qaeda.

Naïve, say those who look to the date for meaning: bin Laden died on 1 May, the same day as Hitler was declared dead (well, depending on which timezone you're in). Clearly, both men were sacrificed to celebrate the anniversary of the founding of the Illuminati. Or Satan is at work; bin Laden's death was apparently announced 66 years and 6 hours after the world learned of Hitler's. Or there's some significance (beyond irony) in the fact that it took place on the Catholic's Divine Mercy Sunday, and the day Pope John Paul II was beatified, though there's little agreement as to what that significance might be: a vial of Pope John Paul II's blood was displayed for veneration at the ceremony, so it could be bad voodoo juju. It certainly doesn't bode well for the Catholic Church, which is now as good as assured of being the target of the world's next nuclear bomb, according to davidgrouchy on abovetopsecret.com.

And for the ultra-paranoid, bin Laden's 'death' is a conspiracy to launch an attack on conspiracists themselves. Posters on abovetopsecret.com are agreed that it's caused a suspicious increase in attacks by the mainstream media on 'crazy' conspiracists (rather than seeing the spike in attention as acknowledgement that their ideas are important enough to merit wider discussion). "Aeonflux" writes that the raid was staged by the powers that be through the mainstream media "to 'out' anyone who may have an alternative view just so they can create a list… we are being made into the enemy and it's a conspiracy!"

Finally, and conjuring up a touching picture of Obama and the Queen sitting together with diaries out, there have been suggestions that the operation was put back a few days so as not to clash with the royal wedding; or else it was the other way round and, as the University of Buckingham's Professor Anthony Glees speculated in an interview with the *Daily Express*, the Palace was forewarned and so postponed the young couple's honeymoon in order to keep them out of danger.

infowars.com, monstersandcritics.com, rawstory.com, LA Times, 2 May; Washington Post, mediamatters.org, rense.com, D.Telegraph, 3 May; International Business Times, Yahoo! News, Time, msnbc.com, 4 May; Spiegel, 5 May; Guardian, 3, 5+6 May 2011; prisonplanet.com; abovetopsecret.com

Jen Ogilvie

SIDELINES...

HANDSHAKE BAN

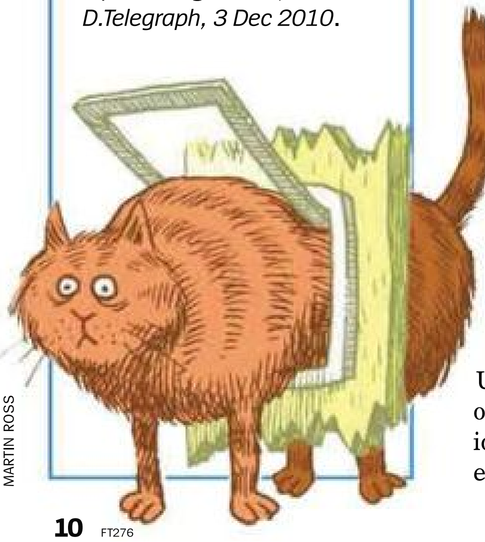
Al-Qa'ida-linked militants in southern Somalia have banned unrelated men and women from shaking hands, speaking or walking together in public. Those who break the rules could be imprisoned, whipped or even executed. The insurgents had earlier banned women from working in public. *(Queensland) Courier-Mail, 10 Jan 2011*.

TABLOIDS FOLD

Sport Media Group (SMG), the publisher of the *Daily Sport* and the *Sunday Sport*, ceased trading on 12 April. If no buyer is found, the 'newspapers' will be the first to close since Murdoch killed off *Today* in 1995. The *Sunday Sport* was founded in 1986 by porn baron David Sullivan, followed by the *Daily Sport* in 1991. They became notorious for daft front-page headlines worthy of the late lamented US tabloid, *Weekly World News*, such as "World War 2 bomber found on Moon" and "Bus found buried at South Pole". *Guardian, Independent, 2 April 2011*.

FAT CATS

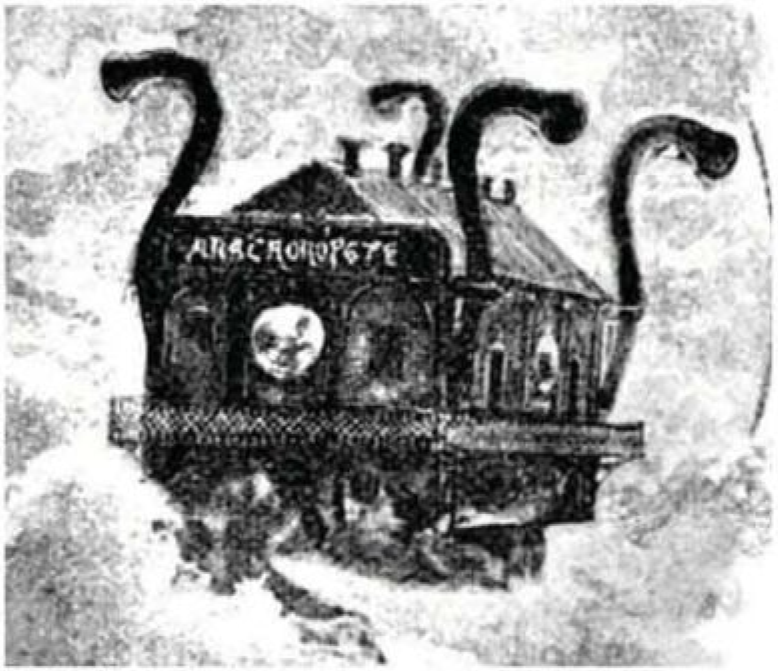
Half of Britain's cats will be so fat in 10 years that they will not be able to squeeze through a standard cat flap, according to research. More Than, the pet insurance company, has designed a larger flap (32x35cm / 12.6x13.8in), with a conveyor belt to take fat cats to automated doors, which open by a paw-recognition system. *D.Telegraph, 3 Dec 2010*.



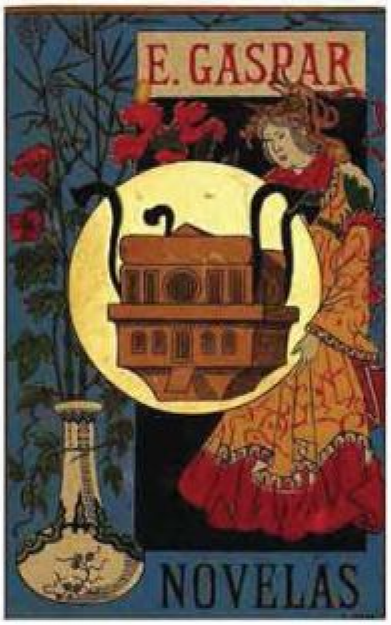
MARTIN ROSS

Wells & truly beaten

There's a first time for everything – even a time machine



The idea of time travel via a mechanical contraption appeared in a work by a little-known Spanish playwright in 1887, several years before the publication of HG Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895). The novel – *El Anacronopete* by Enrique Gaspar, rediscovered by Spanish science fiction fans in the 1990s – features in the British Library's first ever science fiction exhibition, opening in May. It is being translated into English by a couple of American professors, Yolanda Molina-Gavilan and Andrea L Bell, and will be published next year by Wesleyan University Press as *The Time Ship: A Chrononautical Journey*. (The Spanish version was reprinted twice in the last decade but is currently out of print, although the text can be found via Google.)



BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD

"This does seem to be the first literary description of a time machine noted so far," said Andy Sawyer, librarian of the Science Fiction Foundation Library at the University of Liverpool and one of the curators of the BL exhibition. "There are, of course, much earlier descriptions of travelling through time – usually in a dream, but occasionally by some kind of magic. Edward Page Mitchell's story *The Clock That Went Backward* (1881) is usually described as the first time-machine story, but I'm not sure that a clock quite counts."

There is no evidence that Wells had read Gaspar's novel. While HG's time machine was a minimalist affair, Gaspar's was elaborate, an enormous rectangular ship constructed of iron and run on electricity. "The original illustrations are wonderful and those coupled with the descriptions remind me somewhat of Dr Who's TARDIS," says Mr Sawyer. Like the TARDIS, the time ship appears to be bigger on the inside than the outside. Gaspar's invention comes complete with a futuristic laundry, kitchen and observation deck, and the "crew" includes French prostitutes and Spanish soldiers.

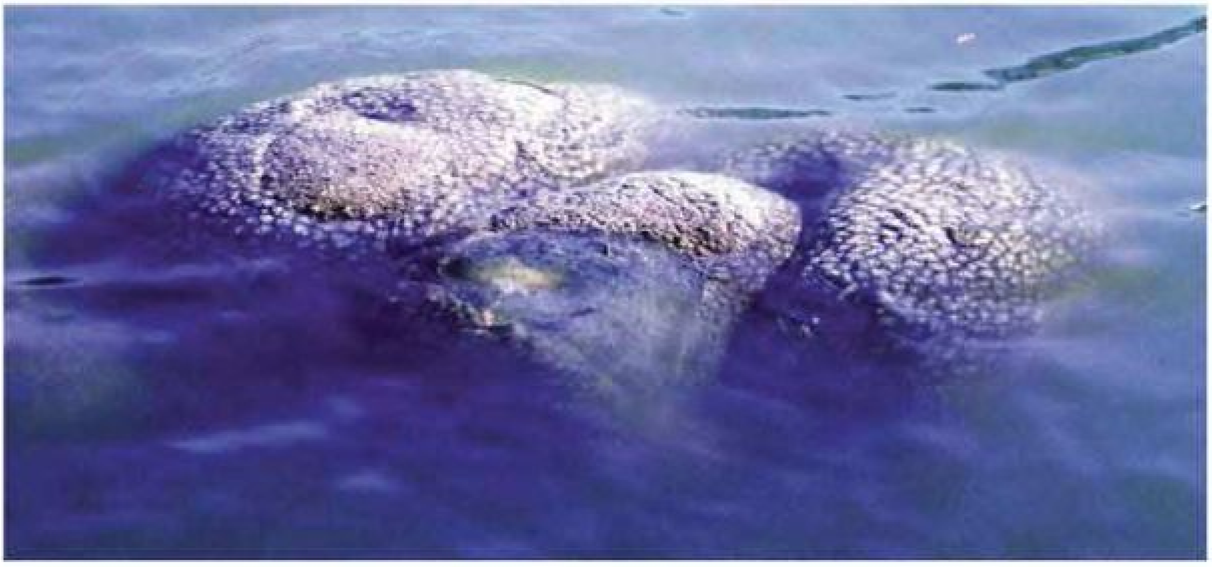
El Anacronopete was originally written as a comic operetta while Gaspar, a flamboyant diplomat, was posted to China. He was a prolific playwright, but also wrote a few novels that dealt with the social impact of science and technology. Nineteenth-century Spanish literature is not associated with fantasy or science fiction; Gaspar probably got his inspiration from French astronomer and author Camille Flammarion and his fellow countryman, Jules Verne. "The novel wasn't meant to be a serious scientific exploration, except as a way of looking at the past or the future as a way of satirising the present," says Mr Sawyer. "It's interesting to look at a novel that was written for motives other than just a fascination with technology." *BBC News, 9 April 2011*.

Earlier time-travel tales involved some kind of magic or dreaming

"Out of This World" is at the PACCAR Gallery, British Library, 96 Euston Road, London, until 25 Sept 2011. Admission is free. Doors open 9.30am Mon–Fri, 11.00 on Sundays and public holidays. Visitor Services: 020 7412 7332.

Lurking in the lake...

An "alien pod" and a duck-billed, moustachioed fish



MR CHARLES SCHMUCK

ABOVE: Colonies of the "magnificent bryozoan" move by co-ordinated pulsing. **BELOW:** The strange fish had been believed mythical.

VIRGINIAN BLOB

Office worker Tracy Collier was out walking her boss's dog by a man-made lake behind her workplace in City Center at Oyster Point – an estate in Newport News, Virginia – when she saw something odd in the water. It was a large, slow-moving, blob-like life form. "It has to be an alien pod," said Ms Collier's work colleague Dale Leonart, though later he suggested it might be "some type of sponge".

The puzzled office workers sent an email with photos to the local Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS). "The object is about 4 feet [1.2m] in diameter," they wrote. "It has moved about 6 feet [1.8m] down the shoreline in the last 24 hours. It 'jiggles' when the waves in the lake hit it... when we prod it, it seems to be spongy feeling... The texture appears to be that of a rock with algæ spots on it – it is brown and yellow, with a pattern of some type."

VIMS experts identified the blob as a very large colony of *Pectinatella magnifica* (aka "the magnificent bryozoan"). They wrote: "Colonies of *Pectinatella magnifica* feature a surface layer of adjoining 'rosettes' – each with 12 to 18 animals or 'zooids' – around a central jelly-like mass that is 99 per cent water. The colonies can be free-floating or attached to a piling or other submerged object. One study even showed that young colonies of *P.magnifica* can actually move on their own by coordinated pulsing of the individual animals."

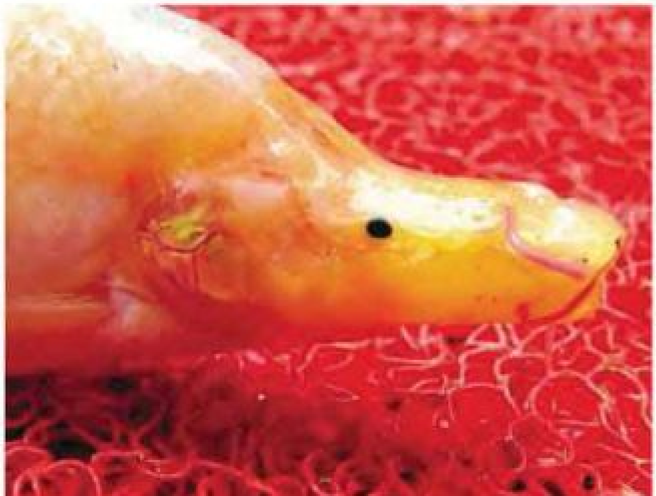
The VIMS experts said they are always glad to receive reports of UFOs (unidentified fishy objects).

> **"It 'jiggles' when the waves in the lake hit it..."**

VIMS Prof. Carl Hersher said the blobby hive-jelly creature eats algæ and thus is "actually a good thing to have around, despite its looks. It's not a sign of bad water quality, and it doesn't hurt fish. It can clog pipes, though, and it will be smelly if it's removed from the water." *www.theregister.co.uk 2 Nov 2010.*

STRANGE FISH FROM CAVE OF FORTUNE LAKE

Odd-looking fish, which experts have been unable to identify, have been caught in a lake in a mountain cave 1,000m (3,300ft) below the ground. The cave, known as Fu Yuan Dong ("Cave of Fortune"), is near Daluo village, Bama County, in southern China's Guangxi province. The waters of the lake are said in the region to give longevity – there is an above-average proportion of centenarians. The fish have a duck bill-shaped flat mouth and red lips, a long, slim 'moustache', and eyes close to the mouth. Village headman Li Zuneng said the oldest villagers had spoken about the fish, but many people considered them to be mythical. *Ananova, 9 Feb 2010.*



BARCROFT MEDIA / QUIRKY CHINA

SIDELINES...

IT'S IN THE NAME

US authorities issued a recall for a brand of Pakistan-made sweets called Toxic Waste Nuclear Sludge Chew Bars – because they actually *were* toxic. The cherry flavouring contained extremely high levels of lead – 0.24 parts per million. *Irish Examiner, 17 Jan 2011*.

MIRACLE WALKER

On 28 March it was announced that a French TV repairman with a paralysed leg hiked 1,000 miles (1,600km) to Santiago de Compostela in Spain following a "remarkable healing" at Lourdes. Serge Francois, 40, from La Salle-et-Chapelle-Aubry in western France, said he felt a warm glow in his herniated left leg after praying at the famous grotto in 2002. His recovery has baffled 20 doctors and could be recognised as the shrine's 68th official miracle. *D.Mirror, Metro, Irish Times, 29 Mar 2011*.

FOR MY NEXT TRICK...

Martin and Carolyn Price of Yetminster, Dorset, took Buster, their Jack Russell, to the vet when he went off his food. An X-ray showed his stomach had ballooned to twice its normal size. The 13-year-old dog had swallowed 36ft (911m) of shiny Christmas ribbon, which was removed by surgery. *Sun, 28 Jan 2011*.

WOLF SIEGE

In February, up to 400 starving wolves laid siege to Verkhoyansk, an isolated Siberian village of 1,400 souls. At the time of the report, the siege had been going on for three weeks and the wolves had killed more than 30 of the villagers' horses in just four days. Everyone who could handle a rifle was mobilised and 24 teams of hunters were assembled. Wolf experts blamed a shortage of natural prey, such as rabbits. Wolf packs of this size are unprecedented, the animals usually forming packs of no more than 12. *D.Mail, 8 Feb 2011*.

SIDELINES...

FOOT NICKED

Karl Lambert from Brevard County, Florida, has filed a lawsuit against paramedic Cindy Economou for stealing his foot, which was severed in a crash on Interstate 95 in 2008. Economou later admitted she took the foot from the crash scene to help train her cadaver-seeking dog. She quit her job soon after the incident. The lawsuit claims that had the foot been delivered to a hospital it could have been reattached. *Wesh.com, 9 Mar 2011*.

DUMB DISGUISE

Neil Simons, 27, is in jail after robbing a shop in Wales wearing a Hallowe'en mask he bought from the shop three days earlier. He had been the only person to buy the disguise. *MX News (Brisbane), 28 Jan 2011*.

NOTHING TO STAND ON

Two surgeons in Sankt Johann, Austria, were charged with negligence after amputating the wrong leg of a 90-year-old woman. The unnamed patient had to have the other leg amputated a few days later. *D.Telegraph, 13 Oct 2010*.

EXCREMENTAL WORK

A 2ft (21cm) replica of the Venus de Milo, sculpted from giant panda dung, was bought for £30,000 by Uli Sigg, the former Swiss ambassador to Beijing, who owns the world's largest collection of contemporary Chinese art. *D.Telegraph, 3 Dec 2010*.

BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

More than US$10,000 was found on the median of US Route 23 north of Columbus, Ohio, on 7 March. Police spent hours collecting the banknotes after a motorist reported seeing money floating past his window. A check with the FBI, armoured car companies and bank couriers failed to establish who had lost the cash. *Dailymail.co.uk, 8 Mar 2011*.

HOLBROOKS HAUNT

A CLASSIC POLTERGEIST CASE IS REPORTED FROM THE COVENTRY AREA, WEST MIDLANDS

CATERS

ABOVE: Lisa Manning with son Jason and daughter Ellie – they have fled their house six times. **BELOW:** Video footage showed this wardrobe door opening and the chair moving across the room. The family has denied any fakery in the events.

A family has been "terrorised by poltergeists" since moving into an end-of-terrace council house in the Holbrooks area of Coventry last September. The disturbances left Lisa Manning (34), her partner Anthony Powell (25), their daughter Ellie (11) and son Jaydon (6), so terrified that they have fled the house six times. "From day one, I felt like someone was watching me, particularly in the kitchen, but I wasn't that bothered," said Lisa. "It never occurred to me it was anything sinister – just a silly shadowy feeling." However, within a fortnight, lights started flicking on and off, footsteps pounded on the upstairs landing when all the family were downstairs and doors slammed shut at odd times. One night in October, Lisa and Anthony were woken by a freezing draft. The front door, which had been locked, was wide open and the sound of heavy running footsteps rang out from Ellie's room – but when they checked, she was fast asleep.

Then the disturbances moved to the kitchen. "First of all, the kettle kept smashing on to the floor and the cutlery drawers started shooting out," said Lisa. "Then, one by one,

CATERS

my casserole dishes smashed onto the floor. For weeks we kept making excuses for the children's sake – it must have been the wind, it must have been one of the dogs. Ellie started hearing voices in her room and we told her she must have been imagining it. And then one day I said, 'I think we should get a crucifix', and suddenly a heavy glass ashtray came flying from the kitchen into the sitting room, followed by the kettle. As we fled to the door, a dirty mug floated off the dining room table and shattered in mid-air and Ellie and I felt a force hit us in the shoulder like a great shove, before footsteps pounded up the stairs." Terrified, the family fled to stay with Lisa's mother.

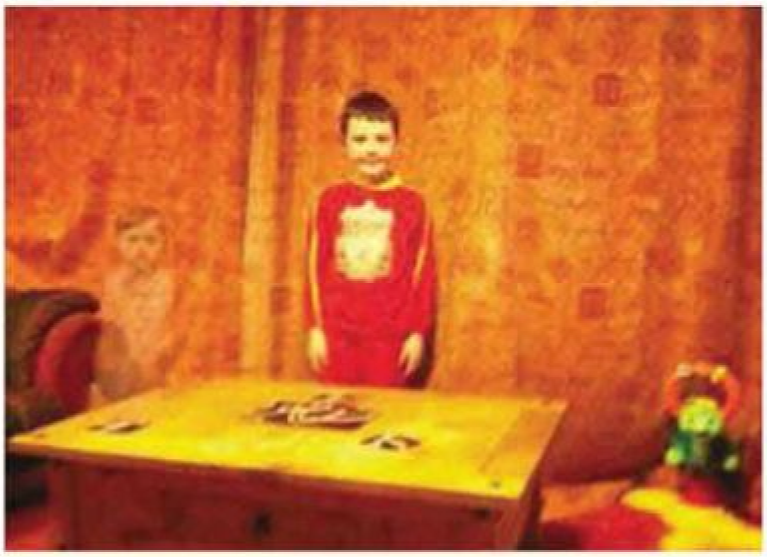
They ventured back, but the disturbances only got worse. Ellie was hit by a flying bleach bottle, cupboard doors were ripped off their hinges, a framed picture bashed Anthony on the side of his head, and the family's bull terriers were "pushed" down the stairs: Rocky suffered two broken legs, while Phoenix suffered such terrible injuries that he had to be put down. Once, Lisa stood on the front lawn and looked up at Ellie's bedroom window to see the lights flashing on and off and the blinds shooting up and down and then "something huge and dark, about seven feet [2m] tall and like an animal". Anthony said that he would wake up with scratches all over his chest and big red handprints on his arms as if someone had been grabbing him in the night. "Even Jaydon and Ellie had scratches on their bodies," said Lisa, "but we hadn't put two and two together then."

A steady stream of spiritual "experts" visited the council house. "We've had priests sprinkling everything with holy water, waving crucifixes and saying prayers, spiritualists with protective crystals and mediums laying salt down at the doorways to keep the evil spirits out," said Lisa. A camera set up in Ellie's bedroom managed to film a wardrobe door opening and a pink chair sliding slowly backwards towards the wall. "It took weeks to capture the poltergeist," she said. "First it was just shadows, which we knew wouldn't be enough to convince anyone, then the video melted in the recorder, but finally we caught it." After seeing the 52-second clip, Whitefriars housing association, the landlords, promised to help relocate the family. Sceptics, however, have pointed out that the ends of the chair legs are out of shot, so it's possible the chair was being pulled along by a string.

On 23 March, the family was watching television when the living room door slammed shut. "Ellie tried to open the door and shouted at Anthony to stop pulling so that she could get out," said Lisa. "She didn't realise he was right behind her. We all tried to open the door, but it was stuck as though someone had put their weight behind it. In the end we got out through the window...

"People are calling us liars. They say it's a hoax. But all I can say is: we've been through six kettles, all my casserole dishes have been smashed, the children's television and Nintendo have been destroyed and I've only two cups left that aren't chipped from being hurled around." Ellie, currently staying with her grandmother, said: "I'm scared to go home and I don't like to go upstairs on my own."

The family even had celebrity TV "ghostbuster" Derek Acorah round, armed with more crystals, salt, cleansing prayers and a film crew. He blamed a very angry man called Jim, who had once lived there and died of a heart attack aged 58. His spirit had allegedly attached itself to Ellie. Acorah claimed to have banished "Jim" and said the polt had finally gone. Time will tell... Jane Fryer in her *Daily Mail* report says that the people who lived in the house before Lisa and her family had apparently left in the middle of the night, leaving brand new carpets and all their possessions in their hurry to get away. *D.Mail, 28 Mar, 2 April; Metro, D.Mirror, 29 Mar; Sun, 29+30 Mar 2011.*



NEWS TEAM INTERNATIONAL

IMAGINARY FRIEND?

A young boy's phantom playmate has been photographed on a mobile phone – allegedly. The image shows five-year-old Sirus Walsh standing next to a childlike "ghost". The family subsequently claimed their house in Redhill, Surrey, was haunted, but insisted their spooky visitors were not threatening. A family friend, an alleged psychic, said the house had lots of people from the Other Side.

"My daughter [Sarah Walsh] was just taking pictures of her children larking about with her new phone, when she saw that the first photo of her two boys had a halo over both of them," said Sirus's grandmother, Julie Smith, 52. "She thought, 'This isn't right' and deleted it. It was when she took the next picture that we noticed Sirus's little playmate. What was quite strange is she put it on to Facebook, and within an hour it must have had about 20 comments – but then it disappeared off the site." Ms Smith denies the photo is faked, asserting that no one in her family has the technical know-how to create a forgery. *Metro, 4 April 2011.*

SIDELINES...

TASTY RUBBER

A pride of lions descended on a game ranger's car in Botswana and stole his spare tyre, perhaps thinking it was prey. They targeted Willem Botha's 4x4 in Khutse Park while he was asleep. He awoke to see a lion rolling his spare tyre away before it was torn to shreds by other pride members. *Metro, 28 Mar 2011.*

RED-HANDED

A driver was warned by police for squirting tomato ketchup at members of the public after stopping to ask for directions. The man, who drove a Ford Mondeo, struck three times in Morley and Gildersome, West Yorkshire, in November. *Independent, 10 Dec 2010.*

INTERNET SABOTAGE

A 75-year-old woman cut off the Internet in Georgia and neighbouring Armenia. She was scavenging for copper in the village of Ksani, north of Tbilisi, the Georgian capital, when she cut into fibre optic cables. Georgian Railway Telecom, which owns the cable, said 90 per cent of users in Armenia lost access for nearly 12 hours and Georgia was also hit. *D.Telegraph, 7 April 2011.*

FOX SHOOTS MAN

A hunter became the hunted after a fox managed to shoot him with his own gun. The stricken animal somehow pulled the trigger of the man's shotgun with its paw, hitting him in the leg. The incident in the Grodno region of Belarus happened as the unnamed 40-year-old hunter tried to kill the fox with the butt of his gun after shooting it from a distance. The fox escaped while the injured man was taken to hospital. *[AP] D.Mail, 15 Jan 2011.*

MARTIN ROSS

SIDELINES...

MOOSE ON THE LOOSE

Yvonne Studley, 49, from Kitimat in British Columbia, was on her way home in May 2010 when a pregnant moose ran in front of her car, crashed through the windshield and landed on her, breaking her wrist, arm and hand, fracturing five ribs and causing bleeding on the brain. On 18 June, her sister Connie Everitt, 51, set out to visit her in Vancouver General Hospital, but her car too hit a moose and she too ended up in hospital. *(Toronto) National Post, 22 June 2010*.

THE URGE TO CONFESS

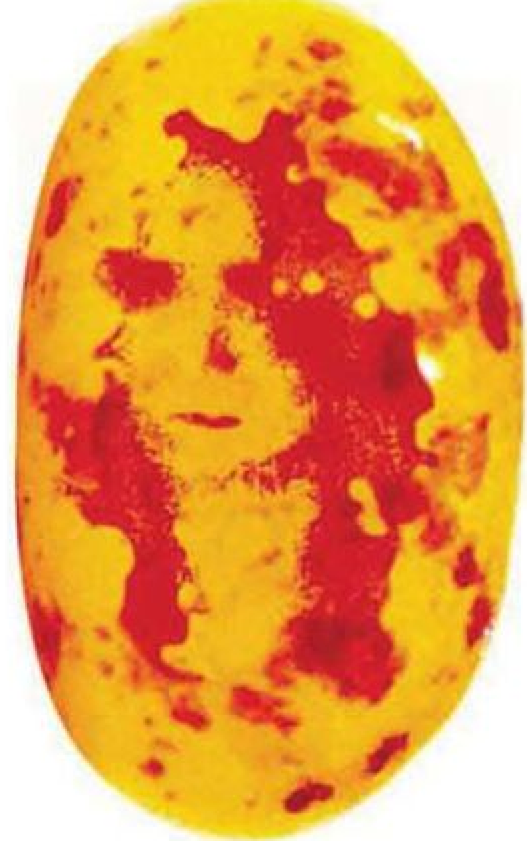
Swedish prime minister Olof Palme was assassinated in Stockholm on 28 February 1986 (**FT201:53**). In the last quarter of a century, 130 people have confessed to the killing, but all have been ruled out as suspects and the investigation continues. *The Local (Sweden), 21 Feb 2011*.

TWIN APPENDECTOMIES

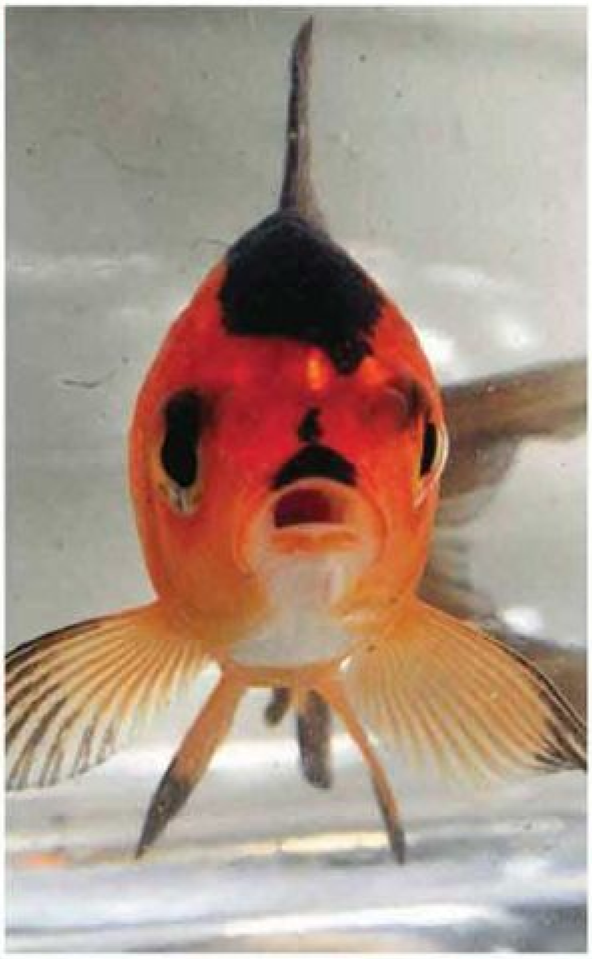
When John Atkin, 35, discovered he needed to have his appendix out, he nipped home to Hull, East Yorkshire, to find his twin brother Chris waiting for him, having sensed that something was wrong. Within a week, Chris succumbed to the same complaint and had the same op at the same hospital. "When we were younger," he said, "John broke his leg and I felt the pain and my leg swelled up. I do believe in this stuff." *Sun, Metro, 25 Feb 2011*.

MARTIN ROSS

THE SMALL FACES



SWNS



THE SUN

KATE IN A BEAN

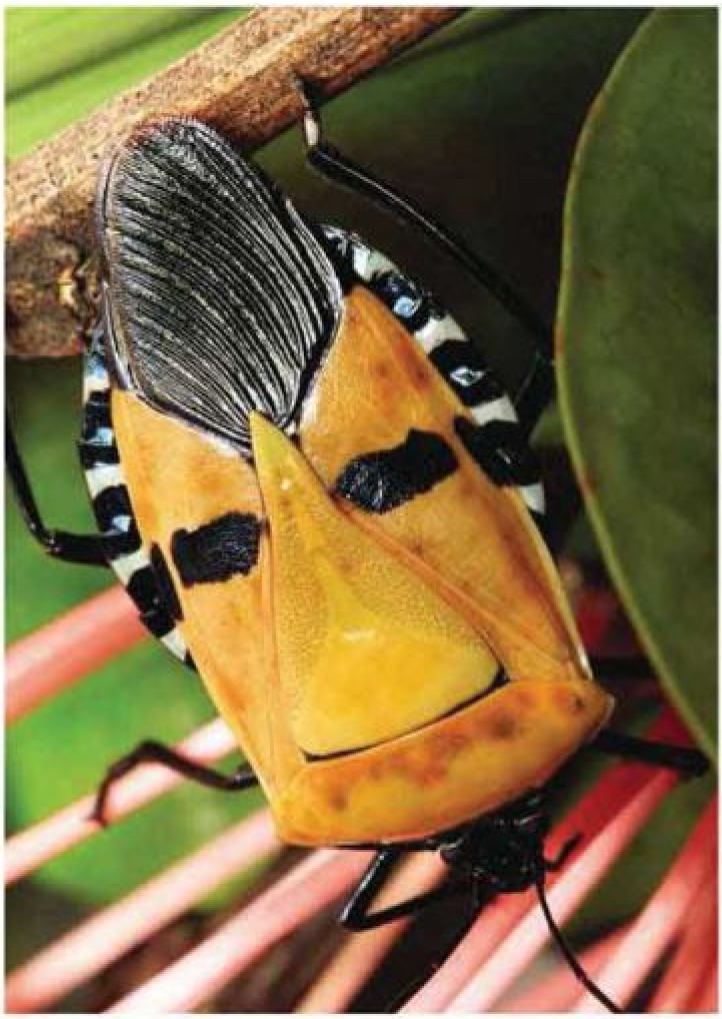
A jellybean (above) appearing to show a portrait of Kate Middleton, now Duchess of Cambridge after marrying Prince William, was discovered by trainee accountant Wesley Hosie, 25, of Taunton, Somerset, who hoped to sell it on eBay for as much as £500. A few days earlier, it was announced that someone called Malcolm West had created a wedding portrait of William and Kate using 11,000 ordinary jellybeans. *News of the World, 10 April; Metro, D.Mail, D.Telegraph, 15 April 2011*.

FÜHRER FISH

Four-year-old Ellena Schatynski of Stockport, Greater Manchester, won this goldfish (above right) at a fair. It was only after her parents placed the little critter in their tank that they noticed his resemblance to Hitler, so he was dubbed "Adolfish". *Sun, 22 Mar 2011*.

KING OF THE BEETLES

Winston Jansen, 32, photographed the stink-bug shown at right while exploring the western forests of his homeland, Singapore. He thought the jet-black quiff, dark eyes and sideburns made it look like Elvis – but it could be any rocker, spiv or Teddy boy really. *Sun, Metro, 5 April 2011*.



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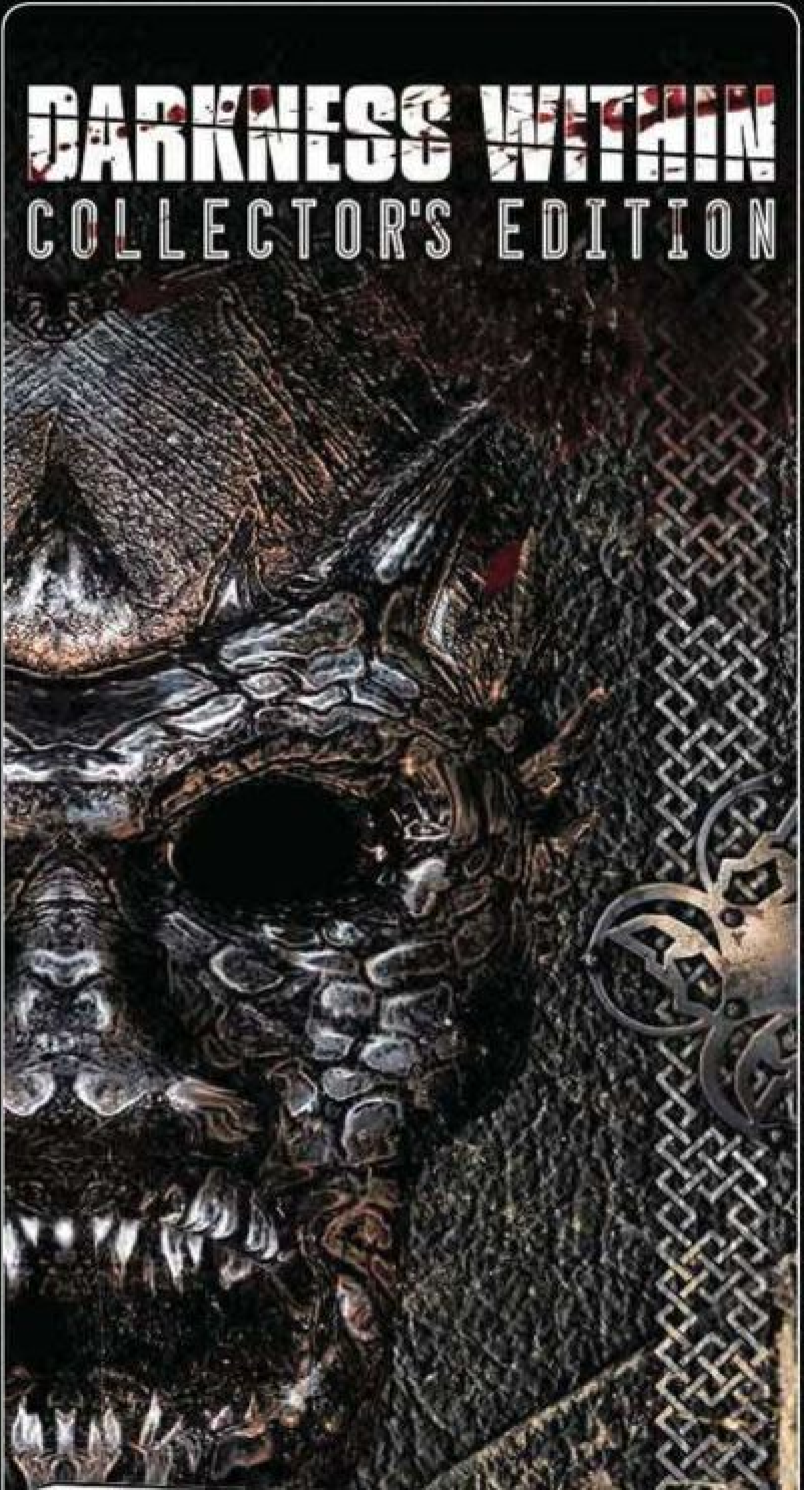
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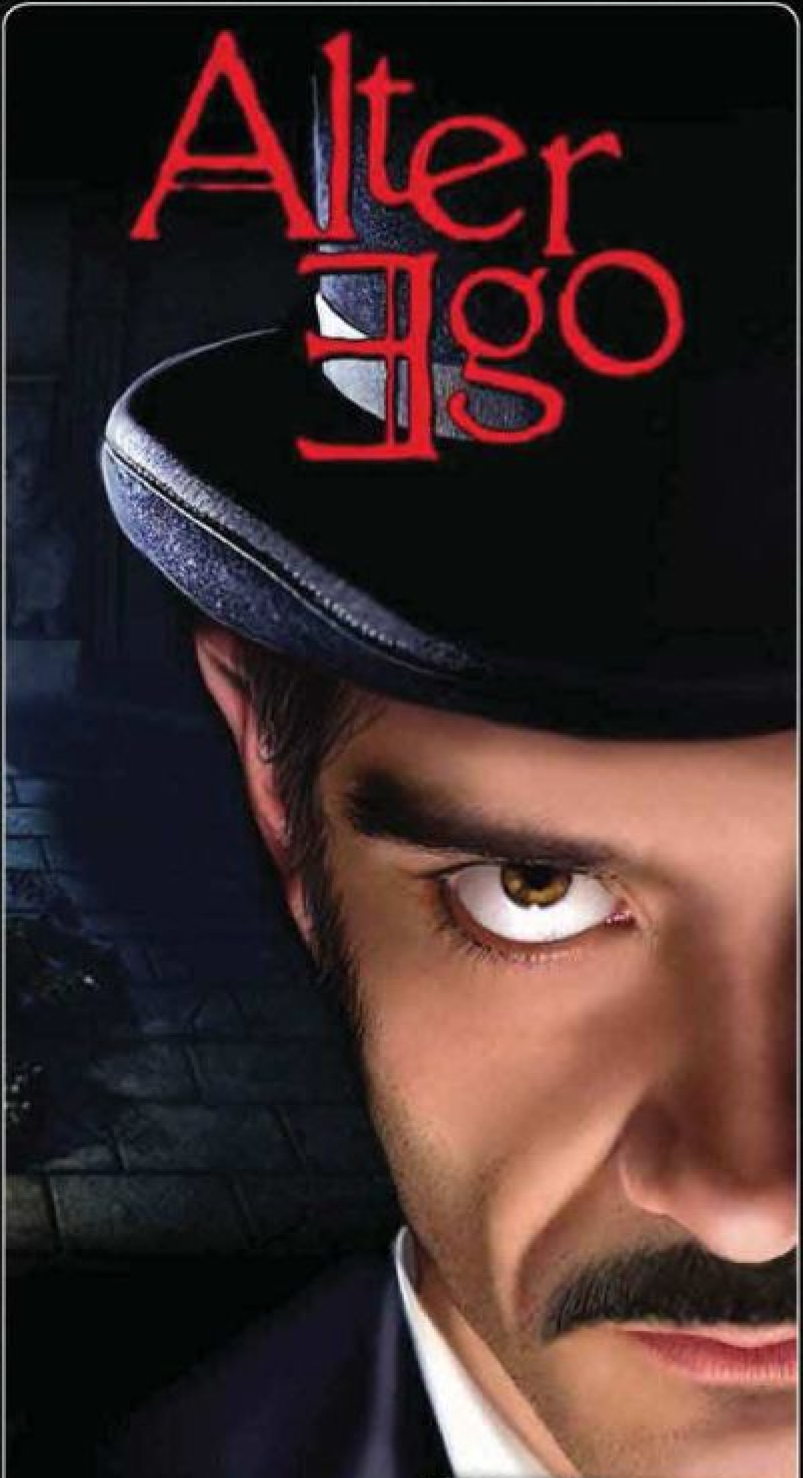

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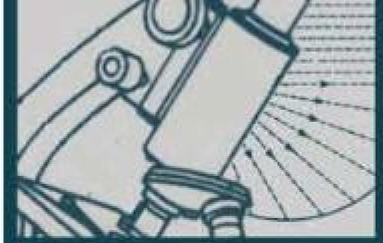


MATT PATTINSON

THE MEN IN WHITE SUITS

For all the new technology proposed to improve the world, **DAVID HAMBLING** reports, many ideas will fail when investors aren't convinced or experts don't like the theories.

New inventions routinely fail to live up to their promise. Polyester and nylon are cheap and hardwearing, but after the initial enthusiasm people reverted to natural fabrics. Valium and Prozac enjoyed their heydays as panaceas, but lost ground when their disadvantages became apparent. But rarer and more tantalising are Men in White Suits, who come up with an amazing technological breakthrough and then vanish forever.

Sometimes we are left asking "Whatever happened to…" because unexpected limitations or flaws in the original research sink the invention; but many genuine discoveries fail between the laboratory and the marketplace, and the root cause is usually money. Even fairly modest inventions take millions to turn into practical products, and this means that investors are needed to put up the capital. Programmes like *Dragon's Den* overdramatise the process, but do capture its essence: persuading investors that your invention works and is a likely source of profit.

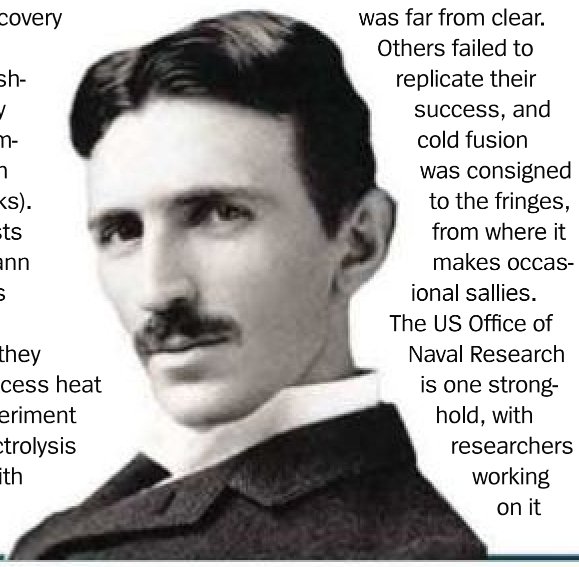
Investors are not scientists, and rely on established experts for an opinion on whether an untried new breakthrough is worth a punt. However, the scientific community is hostile to researchers from outside the establishment, so they are unlikely to give support – so unless you're lucky, or have a few million in the bank already, or have a working prototype that is unarguably brilliant, your new invention is likely to remain forever unbuilt.

PHILIPPE PLAILLY / EURELIOS / SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY

The patron saint of such inventors is Nikola Tesla (right). One of the celebrated pioneers of the early days of electricity, Tesla was responsible for the alternating current (AC) system now used around the world. His great dream was wireless electricity transmission, and from 1901 he started work on a system to power an industrial park at Wardenclyffe on Long Island [**FT217:32–39**; http://bit.ly/4t1XY]. Unfortunately, the costs kept growing until JP Morgan, the wealthy banker who was funding the project, lost faith in the eccentric Tesla. The power-transmitting system was never completed and was dismantled in 1917. The media still loved him, and Tesla still promised new wonders including death-rays and weather control, but after the Wardenclyffe debacle there was no funding and no chance these dreams would be realised.

Tesla promised new wonders that included death-rays and weather control

Wireless power transmission has barely progressed since then. You can get wireless devices to recharge your mobile without having to plug it in, but these waste energy. Whether Tesla's scheme to beam electricity efficiently over long distances would work remains imponderable.



Cold fusion is the classic example of a discovery rejected by the scientific establishment, ruining any chances of commercial exploitation (assuming it works). In 1989, scientists Martin Fleischmann and Stanley Pons (pictured above) announced that they had produced excess heat in a desktop experiment involving the electrolysis of heavy water with a palladium electrode. This excess heat could only be explained by nuclear energy, they claimed. In effect, they had created a cheap, portable, nuclear reactor that could in theory supply the world's energy needs forever (**FT172:14**).

Scientists were appalled at the way Pons and Fleischmann announced their results to the press rather than via a peer-reviewed journal; and the science behind the discovery was far from clear. Others failed to replicate their success, and cold fusion was consigned to the fringes, from where it makes occasional sallies. The US Office of Naval Research is one stronghold, with researchers working on it in their 'spare time' rather than as part of funded projects, and Italian researchers have claimed successes recently. But after the previous failures, investors are shying well away.

Various other fusion projects are in the same boat. Dr Paul Koloc has been working on a form of artificial ball lightning since the 1980s [**FT246:14**]. In his invention, nuclear fusion takes place in a free-floating, self-sustaining magnetic field shaped like a doughnut. Getting even a million or two is not so easy for someone outside the establishment and without the backing of a major university. Without funding, we will never know whether it really works, and Dr Koloc will be just another inventor who could have been a contender. The situation is very similar with bubble fusion, in which nuclear reactions appear to occur in tiny bubbles blasted by high-intensity sound (**FT224:13**).

Meanwhile, the giant ITER hot fusion reactor has attracted billions of euros of government funding. While some progress has been made, more than five decades of research have failed to produce a working fusion reactor. But the money keeps pouring in, because respectable scientific institutions say that the technology ought to work someday, even after such a dismal return on the investment so far.

By contrast, if other scientists are actively scornful of your work then you have little chance, however impressive the prospects are. Dr Roger Shawyer's Emdrive could be the future of space travel, a reactionless drive based on a resonant chamber filled with microwaves [**FT201:14**]. Dr Shawyer has a track record with European satellite systems, and has a working demonstration model of his Emdrive. This appears to produce thrust without reaction. But most scientists would rather dismiss it out of hand, on the basis that it can't possibly work, than look at it. So after an initial flurry of media attention, the Emdrive may never get the development programme it needs to make it into spacecraft.

The current system does act as a buffer to keep out a tide of half-baked 'breakthroughs' by legions of crazed inventors; but there is no telling how many world-changing discoveries never make it to the market simply because they can't get past the dragons.

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MATT PATTINSON

ARCHÆOLOGY

Our archæological round-up is brought to you by **PAUL DEVEREUX**, a founding co-editor of the peer-review *Time and Mind: The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture* (www.bergpublishers.com).

PAUL DEVEREUX / RCA

LEFT: Part of Carn Goedog on Mynedd Preseli, a key source of dolerite for Stonehenge's bluestones. Many ringing rocks were identified.

BELOW: Part of the rhyolite outcrop near Pont Saeson, recently identified as the origin of some of Stonehenge's bluestones. No ringing rocks (lithopones) were found here.

BLUESTONE MYSTERY CONTINUED

The perennial mystery of how and why the Stonehenge bluestones (the smallest and original stones at the monument) arrived at the iconic site approximately 150 miles (240km) from their source in the Preseli hills (Mynydd Preseli) of southwest Wales has been given a further twist by recent research.

There are two types of bluestone to be found at Stonehenge – dolerite and rhyolite. The Carn Menyn rock outcrops on the southern edge of Mynydd Preseli have long been identified as the source area of some of the dolerite bluestones, and now research using standard petrology plus sophisticated chemical analysis by Dr Richard Bevins, Keeper of Geology at the National Museum of Wales, Dr Rob Ixer, University of Leicester, and Dr Nick Pearce of Aberystwyth University, has seemingly identified a source for at least one of the rhyolite bluestones at Stonehenge. It is a striking outcrop on the floor of a narrow valley near Pont Saeson, immediately beneath the northern flank of Mynydd Preseli. This finding has rekindled an old debate – were the stones brought to Stonehenge by human agency or glacial action?

There are pros and cons on both sides, though most archæologists plump for human agency. But because the Pont Saeson rhyolite outcrop is below the northern slopes of Mynydd Preseli, and the route to Stonehenge would presumably have led southwards, the researchers consider it unlikely that humans would have lugged the rocks over the bulk of Preseli and suggest that either the glacial explanation needs to be reconsidered or another human transportation route needs to be identified (perhaps via sea from nearby Newport Bay?). News of this rhyolite research has been "bubbling under" since 2009, but the formal paper was published (in the *Journal of Archæological Science*) only in March 2011.

During their years of exhaustive "needle in a haystack" investigation (as they called it) of the Mynydd Preseli area, the researchers identified Carn Goedog, an isolated rock outcrop to the northwest of the main Carn Menyn outcrops, as the primary source of many of the Stonehenge dolerite bluestones.

As some *FT* readers will know, your columnist has been involved in the Royal College of Art's 'Landscape & Perception' project (www.landscape-perception.com), which has been conducting acoustic and visual mapping on and around Mynydd Preseli. Most of the acoustic research has been focused on the Carn Menyn outcrops, where numerous lithophonic (ringing or musical) rocks have been identified, but in April 2011 we conducted preliminary acoustical checks at the recently identified Pont Saeson rhyolite outcrop, as well as at Carn Goedog on Mynydd Preseli, which hadn't been checked previously. The Pont Saeson location proved to have no acoustical rocks that could be detected, but the Goedog outcrop produced many lithophonic examples.

PAUL DEVEREUX / RCA

BIG BUNNIES

Palæontologists on the Spanish Mediterranean island of Majorca have found the fossil remains of a giant rabbit, dating back 3–5 million years. Named *Nuralagus rex*, the ancient bunny was so large that it couldn't have hopped (its backbone was too short and stiff, apparently), and would have weighed some 12kg (26lb). The researchers figure that it would have spent most of its time digging for roots to eat, and that it probably had poor eyesight and hearing because it had small eye sockets and short ears. "Not a bunny as we know it, Jim", as *Star Trek*'s Mr Spock might have said. *i, 23 Mar 2011*.

One cannot help but speculate whether or not this fossil might possibly indicate that some sort of genetic vestige of gigantism could have been left within modern rabbit populations, given sighting reports of anomalously large rabbits, some of which have appeared in *FT* [**FT220:77**, **233:75**].

ONLY FOOTPRINTS LEFT BEHIND

Several trails of prehistoric human footprints, along with tracks of red deer and aurochs (extinct giant cattle), have been found along a 2½ mile (4km) length of coast between Formby and Ainsdale, Merseyside. Dating back about 5,000 years, they are an exceptional example of the footprints that have been found in the area since the 1950s. Erosion of beach sand is revealing layers of mud and sediment laid down in the late Neolithic era and early Bronze Age. Footprints and animal tracks became "locked into" the sediments from that period. Government scientists looking to protect the footprints might try to create a marine conservation zone in the area. *Champion News, 9 Dec 2010*.

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CLASSICAL CORNER

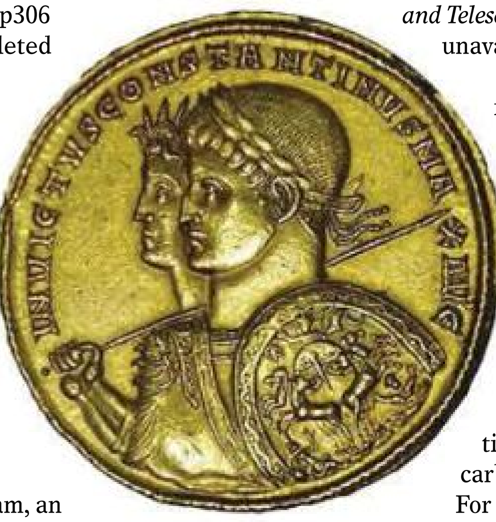
FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

138. DON'T LET THE SUN CATCH YOU LYING

(Apologies to Gerry & The Pacemakers) Some amiable marginalia to Patrick Mahoney's excellent piece [**FT275:49**] on Constantine's vision.

Lactantius's (c. 250 – c. 325) Latin account precedes the Greek one of Eusebius. He doesn't claim Constantine himself as the source, but must have been close to the Emperor, the latter having appointed him tutor to royal son Crispus c. 317.

Depending which text you read – there has been much editorial emendation (for details, TD Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, Cambridge, Mass. 1981, p306 n146): one (J Rougé) deleted the entire sign description – the emblem was either the Chi-Ro Christogram or the Staurogram, already established in the third century as symbol of the Cross (JL Creed, *Lactantius: De Mortibus Persecutorum*, Oxford, 1984, p119 n9).



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Lactantius later (*DMP*, ch46) claims another miraculous dream, an angel appearing to Constantine's then colleague and fellow-Christian Licinius prior to another civil war battle. As Mahoney says, these ages abounded in miraculous visions. For easy example, the barbarian general Gainas had an angelic warning during civil strife c. 400; the Virgin Mary made several guest appearances over Constantinople (Virgin on the ridiculous?); and so on.

Barnes (p306 n147) suggests the story may also have been inspired by Judas's dream in 2 Maccabees 15. Other possible parallels could include the Rain Miracle wrought by the prayers of Christian soldiers in Marcus Aurelius's army (see, e.g., Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, bk5 ch5), plus the simple fact that Roman rulers from Romulus on had dreams and visions good and bad at critical moments (e.g. Livy, *Roman History*, bk1 ch7 para1; Suetonius, *Life of Augustus*, ch 95 – same vulturine phenomenon).

Incidentally, there was a more fortean moment on the other side at this critical battle. The pagan Greek chronicler Zosimus (*New History*, bk2 ch16) reports, "When Maxentius had led his forces out of Rome and crossed the bridge, owls in endless number flew down and covered the wall," a sight that encouraged Constantine to join battle.

Eusebius's *Life of Constantine* abounds in dubious details; cf. TG Elliott, 'Eusebian Frauds in the *Vita Constantini*,' *Phoenix* 45, 1991, 162–71. Discrepancies between this and his *Ecclesiastical History* have induced some scholars to doubt his authorship of the biography.

Mahoney's solar-ice particles explanation was anticipated by, e.g., AHM Jones, *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe* (1949), p96; Barnes, p306 n147; P Weiss, "'The Vision of Constantine", *Journal of Roman Archæology* 16 (2003) pp237–59. Barnes adduces pictures of solar halos from *Sky and Telescope* 54 (1977/8), p185 – unavailable to me.

The TV *Ancient Rome* meteorite notion reflects the theory proposed some years earlier (BBC news bulletin "Space Impact Saved Christianity", 23 June 2003) by Swedish geologist Jens Ormo, who claimed to have found the actual crater and confirmed its right time period by radiocarbon dating.

For some entertaining fictions, see Colin Thubron's novel *Emperor* (Penguin, 1991). Fort of course abounds with solar phenomena and meteorites.

Mahoney is right to emphasise links with solar worship, especially Sol Invictus. The latter, previously number one with emperor Aurelian (270–275) was the patron deity of Constantine's imperial father Constantius (Barnes, pp12+290, n88 for source references). Constantine, soon after this battle and for several years afterwards, continued to strike coins (above) linking himself iconographically with this solar patron (Barnes, pp36, 48, 309, nn 47, 49).

Apart from dreams and visions, Constantine was also beneficiary of a historical fraud, namely the invention by one of his anonymous Latin panegyricists (no6, para2; cf. the *Augustan History*'s biography of Claudius, ch1 para3, plus Barnes, pp35, 301 nn60–2) of a family connection with the 'perfect prince' Claudius II (268–70).

Given this and his distinctly un-Christian rule (e.g. liquidation of son Crispus and wife Fausta, barbarous punishments for errant slaves, reduction of the peasantry to serfdom), redeemed – he hoped – by death-bed baptism at the hands of Eusebius, we are justified in pronouncing his name CON-stantine.

MATT PATTINSON

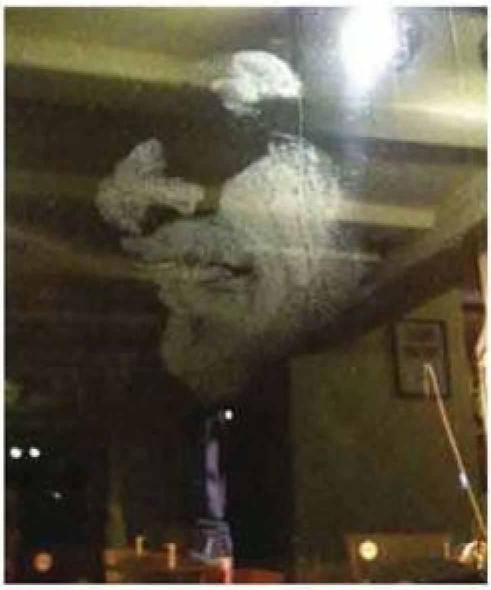
GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE reports on a Shropshire tavern's phantom face and ghosts with violent pasts.

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW

Last issue's column looked at the unholy alliance between television, celebrities and the paranormal; one wonders if trickery and the need for spooky entertainment lie behind a mysterious image resembling a face which appeared on a window pane at a Shropshire pub (right), the White Hart Inn at Ironbridge in the first week of January 2011. "Ghost or hoax?" asked the *Shropshire Star*, reporting "speculation ran riot" as to the cause of the mark which appeared on 5 January 2011. It was not wholly clear whether the peculiar mark was inside the glass or on the surface. Perhaps sensing that the face was attracting custom to his pub in the lean weeks after New Year, bar manager Mr Herbert took steps to ensure it was not erased by cleaners. Just who or what might be manifesting at the pub was an unanswered question. Some suggested it looked like Elvis; others claimed it was the same face that supposedly appears in other pubs in the next county, Herefordshire…

But the possibility of genuine manifestations was given a boost when former landlady Katherine Burford recalled experiences in the 1980s. She had run the pub in 1984–86, and told reporters: "We used to hear children's footsteps running up and down the stairs and we would go out but there would be nothing there." A poodle kept as a pet also showed strange reactions. Events occurred only after the pub customers had left, and also included the mysterious creaking of an empty basket chair, as though someone were sitting down. Ms Burford stated: "We made a bit of a joke of it, but there is definitely something in the pub, and I'm not the kind of person who would imagine anything like this" (*Shropshire Star, 5+11 Jan 2011*).


SHROPSHIRE STAR

Some suggested the image on the window of the pub looked like Elvis

THE TOTTENHAM OUTRAGE

That there is still popular affection left for ghosts emerges in the story involving a ghost boy in Tottenham, north London. Though typical of many stories of hauntings never making it beyond local papers, this one was unusual in claiming a firm identity for the phantom boy – no less than the victim of the 'Tottenham outrage' (to quote the headline in the *Hornsey Journal*). Now there have been quite a few Tottenham outrages of one kind or another, but this one refers to 10-year-old Ralph Joscelyne, shot dead by Latvian anarchists in 1909. Ralph died as he was helping deliver bread, being fatally wounded when running for cover behind a car as two armed robbers opened fire during a wages snatch. Ralph was rushed to hospital but pronounced dead on arrival. The robbers also fatally wounded PC William Tyler before shooting themselves.

While William Tyler lies buried in Stoke Newington cemetery, Hackney, with a fitting memorial, it was felt recently that Ralph Joscelyne deserved a monument. Accordingly, a special memorial plaque was unveiled on the anniversary of his death, 23 January 2011, outside the Anglican Church of the Good Shepherd, Mitchley Road.

Certain residents maintain that Ralph's ghost returns. In one "vision", Grace Benjamin, 67, of Mitchley Road, says she saw Ralph standing by her back door – yards from where he was killed – apparently sheltering from the rain. She said: "It was very clear and there were so many similarities with the boy. He looked about 11 and he looked slightly foreign – that's why it was so spooky. My daughter had told me about what happened when I moved into my house, but this vision happened several years later. I couldn't believe it. I've had experiences before but this was so accurate. I feel very connected to him."

It seems that other residents also feel favourably inclined to Ralph's haunting and believe that he is "looking out for the community". Parishioner William Spring, of nearby Scales Road, said: "One of the reasons there was such a good turnout to the plaque unveiling is that many residents think of Ralph as a good spirit. I know at least some people have seen him… It feels like some sort of a good ghost helping us in the community." Perhaps we are seeing the birth of a new *genius loci*, given that the Tottenham outrage is now at a safe historical distance, being beyond living memory. *Hornsey Journal, 15 Feb 2011*.

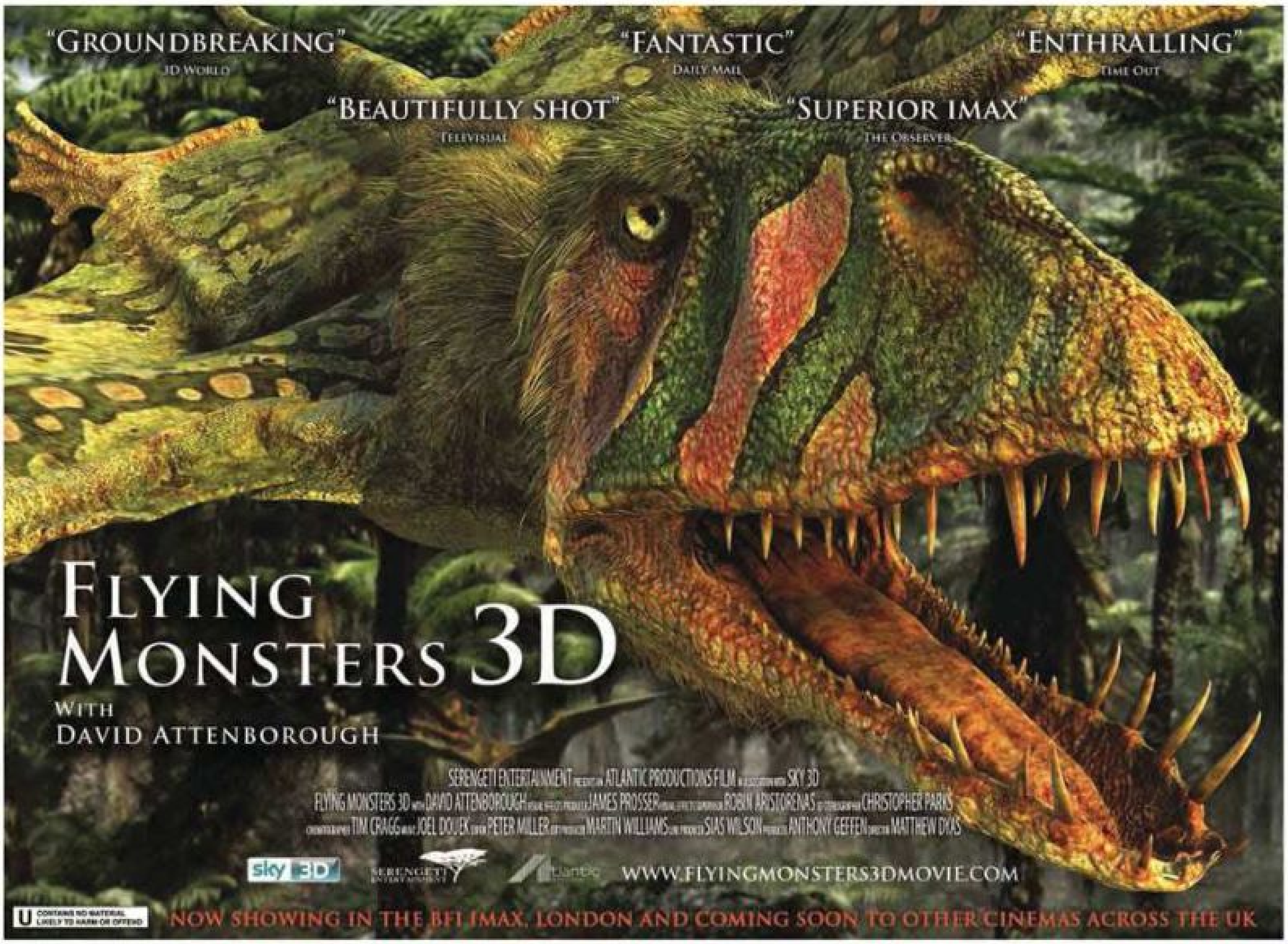
In contrast, it will be a long time before such detachment is possible with a squalid murder case in Herefordshire, linked in court with ghost-hunting at Avenbury Church (see **FT275:16**). The connection emerged at the trial in Worcester Crown Court in November 2010 of drug addicts Shaun Stokes (32) and Petra Stokes (27) of Ledbury, Herefordshire, who stood accused of killing fellow addict Thomas Holt (36) in order to steal a £12,000 inheritance. Two days after receiving money left by his mother's estate, Thomas Holt was last seen getting into Shaun Stokes's car. Driven to a site near the church, he was subjected to a ferocious attack, suffering 14 lacerations and fractures to his skull. Holt's body was then weighted down with rocks and thrown into the River Frome, to be discovered two months later. It was unclear whether he had died from head injuries or drowning.

The area around Avenbury Church (below) was deliberately chosen by Shaun Stokes for disposing of the body. According to prosecutor James Burbridge, QC, the building (below) was reputed to be haunted, and Shaun Stokes was familiar with it from what were described in court as his "ghost-hunting expeditions" to the spot. Following the killing, Shaun and Petra Stokes stole from Holt's bank account, using the money to buy drugs and groceries. Convicted of murder, they were sentenced to life imprisonment in December 2010.

Among ghost stories associated with Avenbury Church was one of its bell ringing of its own accord prior to the death of the vicar, but this seems to have been no more than local superstition (the bell was moved in 1937 to St Andrew by the Wardrobe, London, where it has apparently behaved itself ever since). More reliable stories tell of ghostly organ music, joyous voices heard coming from the church, and apparitions – including a beautiful woman and phantom monks. These were detailed by the daughter of a local vicar, the Rev. EH Archer-Shepherd; the experiences were considered wonderful and impressive ones when she wrote them up in 1970.

OLIVER WEBB

Sources: *Ledbury Reporter*, 2 Nov; *Hereford Times*, 2 Dec 2010; Elliot O'Donnell: *Haunted Churches*, 1939; Peter Underwood: *Haunted London*, 1973; Marion Holbourn: "The Haunted Church of Avenbury", *Quarterly Review*, Churches' Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies, Dec 1970.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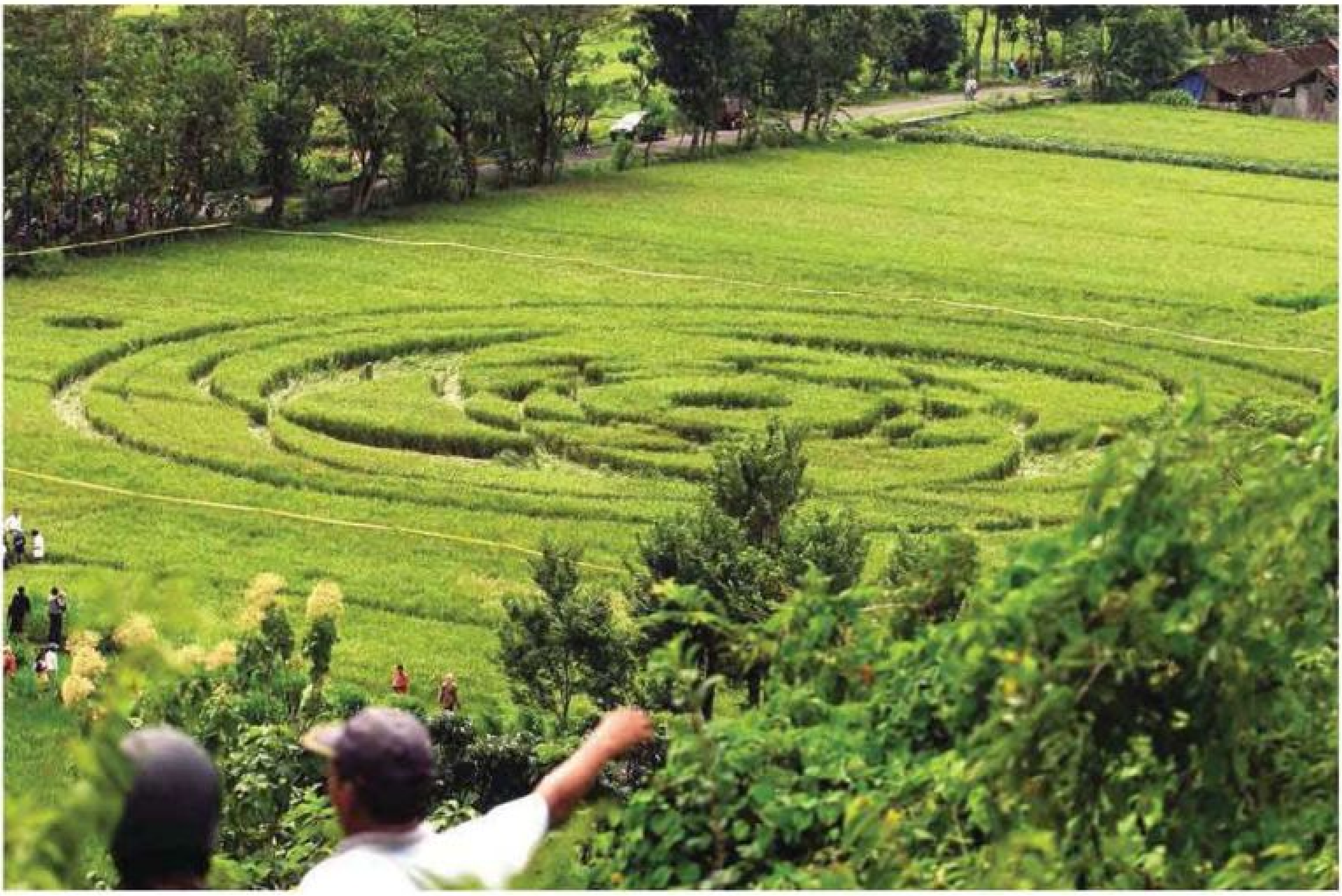


PA PHOTOS / AP

CROP CIRCLE IN JAVA

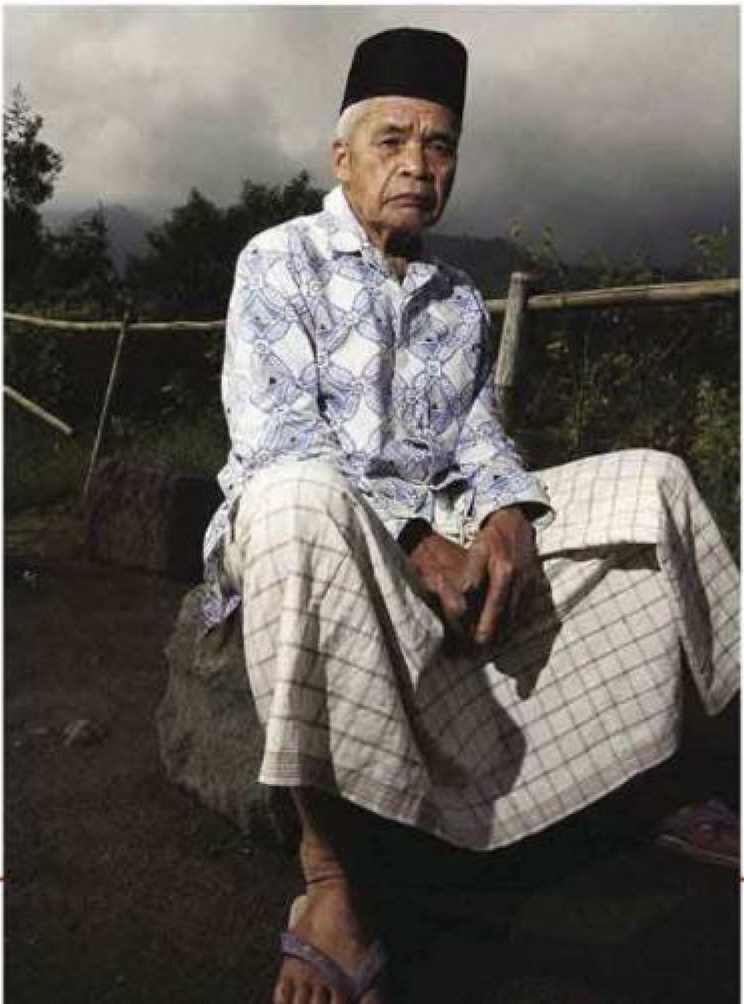
A large crop circle 100ft (30m) in diameter – the first in Indonesia – was found in a paddy field in Krasakan hamlet, Sleman, Yogyakarta, central Java, on 23 January. Inside the circle were a triangle and two smaller circles. Local people, like the witnesses of "saucer nests" in 1960s Australia, believed the pattern was created by a UFO. *Jakarta Post, via Asia News Network, 24 Jan; Metro, 25 Jan 2011.*

ONE KILLED, ONE SAVED

For 33 years, Mbah (Grandfather) Maridjan, 83, was the mystical keeper of Mount Merapit, a volcano in central Java, serving as the conduit for the Sultan of Yogyakarta, Hamengkubuwono X. His annual ritual, carried out beneath a patina of Islam, involved tossing offerings of rice, chickens and flowers into the gaping crater. This maintained harmony between the mountain, the palace and the mythical Queen of the South Sea, Nyai Roro Kidul. The last time Merapi erupted, in 2006, Maridjan defied orders from the government and the sultan to evacuate, and faced down the eruption. This earned him fame, as well as a starring role in TV advertisements for an energy drink, Kuku Bima Ener-G. Last year, however, he was not so lucky.

When Merapit began spewing 1,000°C (1,800°F) gases on 26 October, he again defied evacuation orders, refusing to

The mystical keeper of the volcano starred in TV adverts



GETTY IMAGES / DIMAS ARDIAN

budge from his home in the village of Kinahredjo, just four miles (6.4km) from the crater. His rigid body was found the next day, prostrate in the Islamic prayer position and caked in white volcanic dust. It was unclear how many people's deaths may have been caused, at least in part, by his intransigence. A Red Cross volunteer and a journalist who had travelled to Kinahredjo to urge him to leave were among more than a dozen people found dead near his home. On 28 October, hundreds of people, including politicians, soap opera stars and singers, flocked to Maridjan's funeral on the fertile slopes of the 9,737ft (2,968m) mountain. The sultan had named him "key holder" of the mountain when he was 50, a position he inherited from his father. By 7 November, the death toll from the eruption stood at 138. *[AP] Independent, 28 Oct; Independent on Sunday, 7 Nov; Int. Herald Tribune, 13 Nov 2010.*

On the same day that Merapit sprang to life, a 7.7 magnitude earthquake triggered a 10ft (3m) tsunami that flattened villages in the remote Mentawi islands off the west coast of Sumatra, killing 370 people. A further 400 were missing. "We think two thirds of them are probably dead, either swept out to sea or buried in the sand," said Ade Edward, a disaster management official.

Survivors said they had almost no warning that the wave was bearing down on them, despite a network of alarm buoys off the Sumatran coast set up after the 2004 tsunami.

A rare moment of joy for rescuers was provided two days after the tsunami struck, when a 10-year-old boy found a baby alive in a tree on the island of Pagai Selaton. A relief co-ordinator said the 18-month-old boy was recovering in a health centre. Both his parents were dead. *D.Telegraph, Sun, 29 Oct 2010.*

ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up from the cryptozoological garden

GETTY IMAGES / MINDEN COLLECTION / PATRICIO ROBLES GIL

LIBERIA'S PINT-SIZED PACHYDERM

On 3 April 2011, correspondent Eddie Spillane sent me the following interesting news of what may well be a hitherto undocumented captive specimen of Africa's controversial pygmy elephant:

"For years I've pondered over whether an elephant I saw in 1967 is the pygmy elephant I see regularly cropping up in reports. In 1967 I worked in Liberia and one place we were encouraged to visit was the president's zoo… Besides the pygmy hippo was an elephant… [it] was no more than 6ft [1.8m] at the shoulder but had tusks which reached almost to the ground and to this day I still don't understand why my thoughts at the time and for some years [afterwards] were that it must have been starved! I probably realised it wasn't [starved] when I read Heuvelmans's book years later. I seem to recall that it was a gift to the Liberian President from the Congolese President."

The book in question was of course Dr Bernard Heuvelmans's pioneering cryptozoology tome *On the Track of Unknown Animals* (1958), which contains a detailed account of the pygmy elephant. Based upon Eddie's description of it, the Liberian specimen does resemble the latter cryptid – which, despite several specimens having been exhibited alive and well in various Western zoos (including London and the Bronx), has never been universally accepted by science as a valid, taxonomically discrete form, although in 1906 it did receive its own scientific name – *Loxodonta* (*africana*) *pumilio*.

Sceptics tend to discount sightings (which emanate primarily from the Congolese region and elsewhere in central Africa) as reports of juvenile forest elephants *L.cyclotis*, even though some such sightings have featured entire herds of diminutive elephants, with, like the Liberian one, fully developed adult-sized tusks. It would naturally be very useful to view a photograph of the Liberian zoo elephant, and Eddie has promised to look through his collection of colour photoslides in case there are any depicting it among them, so watch this space… *Eddie Spillane, pers. comm., 3 April 2011*.

NEW GUINEA TASSIE?

During December 2010 and January 2011, explorer Andrew Hughes, sponsored by the Australian Geographic Society, spent eight weeks searching for the officially extinct thylacine (Tasmanian wolf) not only in the remote wilds of southwest Tasmania but also in the southern highlands of Papua New Guinea (PNG) – where he paddled down the Strickland River and learnt about traditional hunting practices from local tribes. New Guinea attracts far less field investigation of possible thylacine survival than does Australia – yet fossil evidence confirms that as recently as three million years ago, the thylacine did exist on this extremely large tropical island as well as on mainland Australia and (until at least as late as 1936) Tasmania. Sadly, however, he didn't find any evidence for its survival anywhere.

Perhaps, however, he should have directed his attention on New Guinea away from PNG and into the verdant, secluded heart of this island's western, Indonesian half – Irian Jaya. For there have been a number of tantalising modern-day reports here of a mysterious striped canine cryptid known to native people as the dobsegna, which corresponds very closely in alleged appearance with the thylacine. Moreover, in this huge, remote, densely forested, but scarcely populated region the prospect of thylacine survival must surely be greater than anywhere in Australia. http://bit.ly/huyTiy *(australiangeographic.com.au/) 8 April 2011*.

IT'S RAINING WORMS!

A recent fall of creepy-crawlies brings to mind some more venerable accounts of peculiar precipitations...

At 9.15am on 29 March, something very strange happened at Galashiels Academy in the Scottish Borders. A group of 22 second-year boys was taking part in football training on an outdoor Astroturf pitch when one of them noticed that a worm had fallen on his shoulder, followed by several more, all of them a pinkish, purple colour. Soon afterwards, the class looked up and saw worms showering down on them from a cloudless sky. "We started hearing this wee thudding noise," said David Crichton, 26, the teacher in charge. "There were about 20 worms already on the ground at this point. Then they just kept coming down. The kids were laughing but some were covering their heads and others were running for cover for a while. They just scattered to get out of the way."

Mr Crichton and his colleagues eventually found about 120 worms after checking the pitch and a tennis court almost 100 yards (90m) away. "I spoke with the science department here but none of them had any explanation for it," said Mr Crichton. "One of them thought maybe it was a freak weather thing; but it was such a clear, calm day. And we are quite a bit away from any of the buildings, so it's not like anyone could have been throwing them." So a practical joke was ruled out, and there seemed to be no meteorological explanation either. A flock of birds had passed overhead, but that had almost disappeared by the time the worms fell. *Scotsman, D.Record, 2 April; Times, 11 April 2011*.

THE SUN

LEFT: A sample of the worms which fell on the sports ground at Galashiels Academy in Scotland's Borders district.

Worm showers are rare, but not unprecedented. According to the 6 August 1872 *Levant Times* (an English paper published in Constantinople), 25 July 1872 was a cloudless, stiflingly hot day in Bucharest, Romania. "Toward 9 o'clock a small cloud appeared on the horizon and a quarter of an hour afterwards rain began to fall which, to the horror of everybody, was found to consist of black worms the size of ordinary flies. All the streets of Bucharest were strewn with these curious animals." [**FT24:5**].

Worms were showering down from a cloudless sky

Charles Fort refers to several worm falls:

"London *Times*, April 24, 1871: that, upon the 22nd of April, 1871, a storm of glutinous drops neither jellyfish nor masses of frog spawn, but something of an insect nature in its larval state, fell in the neighbourhood of the Midland railroad station, Bath. 'Many soon developed into a worm-like chrysalis, about an inch in length.' [..] Several days later, more of these objects fell in the same place. [..]

"London *Times*, April 14, 1837: that, in the parish of Bramford Speke, Devonshire, a large number of black worms, about three-quarters of an inch in length, had fallen in a snowstorm.

"In *Year-Book of Facts*, 1877-26, it is said that, in the winter of 1876, at Christiania, Norway, [i.e. Oslo] worms were found crawling upon the ground. The occurrence is considered a great mystery, because the worms could not have come up from the ground, inasmuch as the ground was frozen at the time, and because they were reported from other places, also, in Norway. [..]

"Large number of worms found in a snowstorm, upon the surface of snow about four inches thick, near Sangerfield, N.Y., Nov. 18, 1850 (*Scientific American*, 6-96). The writer thinks that the worms had been brought to the surface of the ground by rain, which had fallen previously.

"*Scientific American*, Feb. 21, 1891: 'A puzzling phenomenon has been noted frequently in some parts of the Valley Bend District, Randolph County, Va., this winter. The crust of the snow has been covered two or three times with worms resembling the ordinary cutworms. Where they come from, unless they fall with the snow is inexplicable.' In the *Scientific American*, 64-147, March 7, 1891, the Editor says that similar worms had been seen upon the snow near Utica, N.Y., and in Oneida and Herkimer Counties; that some of the worms had been sent to the Department of Agriculture in Washington." [..]

"London *Evening Standard*, Jan. 3, 1924 – red objects falling with the snow in Halmstad, Sweden. They were red worms, from one to four inches in length.

Thousands of them streaking down with the snowflakes – red ribbons in a shower of confetti – a carnival scene that boosts my discovery that meteorology is a more picturesque science than most persons, including meteorologists, have suspected – and I fear me that my attempt to besmirch has not been successful, because the worms of heaven seem to be a jolly lot. [..]

"*New Orleans Daily Picayune*, Feb. 14, 1892 – enormous numbers of unknown brown worms that had fallen from the sky, near Clifton, Indiana. *San Francisco Chronicle*, Feb. 14, 1892 – myriads of unknown scarlet worms – somewhere in Massachusetts – not seen to fall from the sky, but found, covering several acres, after a snowstorm.

"It is as if with intelligence, or with the equivalence of intelligence, something has specialized upon transporting, or distributing, immature and larval forms of life. If the gods sent worms, that would be kind, if we were robins.

"In *Insect Life*, 1892, p.335, the Editor, Prof. C.V. Riley, tells of four other mysterious appearances of worms, early in the year 1892. Some of the specimens he could not definitely identify. It is said that at Lancaster, Pa., people in a snowstorm caught falling worms on their umbrellas." [*Books*, pp.48, 96, 547, 548.]

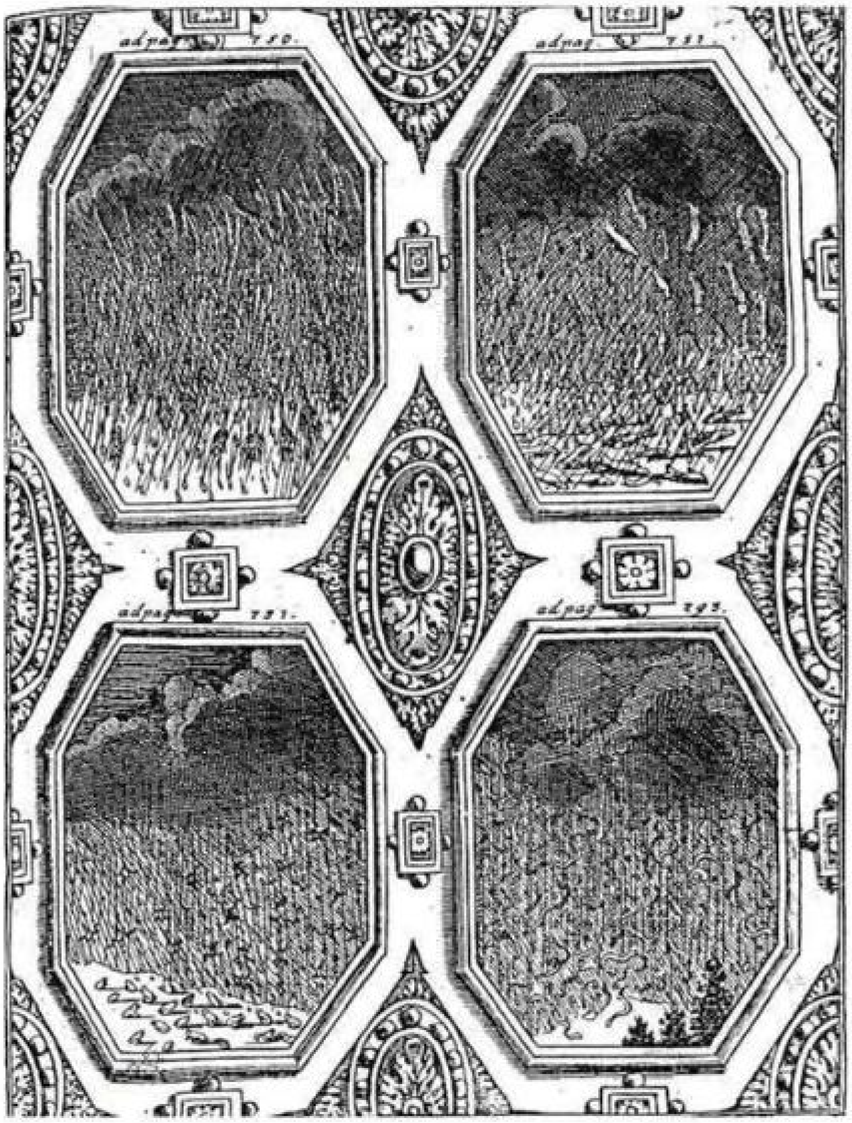
In his collection of curious North American falls, Henry Splitter mentions a shower of angleworms on Virginia City, Nevada, in April 1879 (*Fate*, Oct 1953). There had been a rainstorm during the night, and in the morning the whole town lay under a blanket of wriggling worms. They were not indigenous and could not have come out of hibernation, since they were found on the streets, sidewalks and on roofs.

In 1946 the butler of the Cope family in Philadelphia took advantage of a lull in a torrential rainstorm to take out some refuse and found “thousands of tiny worms, none larger than one third of an inch, blanketing the yard, the fence and the highway”. As reported the next year in *Doubt* (the journal of the original Fortean Society), this was in July, so snow could hardly be blamed. The creatures eluded identification. Unlike more familiar worms, they had “almost microscopic legs and walked like caterpillars”.

In May 1955, the residents of Kinomacki in Finland were horrified by a torrent of worms from the sky, with no accompanying rain or snow (Reuters).

Paul Simons, reporting on the Galashiels worm fall in his ‘Weather Eye’ column (*Times*, 11 April), mentions a fall of small red worms on several villages north of the Cotswolds during a thunderstorm in 1969, and large clumps of tangled worms dropping from the sky in July 2007, witnessed by a woman crossing a road in Jennings, Louisiana. Simons points out that at about the time of the latter fall, a waterspout was sighted over a river less than 5 miles (8km) away, offering support – in this case at least – for the orthodox waterspout explanation for falls of frogs, fish and miscellaneous materials. For showers of insects, see Rickard & Michell: *Rough Guide to Unexplained Phenomena*, 2007, pp36–41.)

- Lajamanu in Australia’s Northern Territory, which saw falls of fish in 1974, 2004, and on 25 and 26 February 2010 [**FT262:24**, **263:71**], was once again bombarded some time in mid-March this year. Lots of small fish were found strewn across the red, stony ground. The remote community, on the edge of the Tanami Desert, is 34 miles (55km) from the nearest river. *Times, 23 Mar 2011*.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ABOVE: A fall of wheat, fish, frogs and worms from Erasmus Francisci’s *Der wunder-reiche Uberzug unserer Nider-Welt* (1680).

KONSPIRACY KORNER

ROBIN RAMSAY, EDITOR OF LOBSTER MAGAZINE, REPORTS FROM THE BUNKER ON...

THE MEMO LINKING JFK, MARILYN MONROE AND MJ-12

I know there hasn’t been much glamour in this column, but how about Marilyn Monroe, JFK and UFOs? The *Daily Mail* revived this one on 19 April with “Was JFK killed because of his interest in aliens? Secret memo shows president demanded UFO files 10 days before his death”. JFK was proposing joint Soviet-American space exploration (in 1963!)[1] and, though the memo’s intent isn’t entirely clear, he seems to have been asking the CIA to review their UFO files in the hope of providing information about the ‘unknowns’ – presumably unidentified sightings – to persuade the Soviets that the UFOs they were seeing were not US espionage devices: “It is important that we make a clear distinction between the knowns and unknowns in the event the Soviets try to mistake our extended cooperation as a cover for intelligence gathering of their defense and space programs.”

The veracity of this document has been questioned,[2] but it did arrive from the CIA after a Freedom of Information request, so it might be genuine.

From this, the *Mail* slid seamlessly into the MJ-12 (Majestic) disinformation quagmire, informing its readers about the ‘burned memo’, in which the Director of Central Intelligence (MJ1) writes to other MJ members and warns them *inter alia*: “As you must know, LANCER [Secret Service code for the president] has made some inquiries regarding our activities which we cannot allow.”[3]

Never mind that the account of this document’s discovery – allegedly pulled from a fire while the CIA were burning sensitive material – is an insult to our intelligence; as we know that the MJ-12 material was cooked-up by the USAF, it’s obviously a fake.

At this point the “*Daily Mail* reporter” who wrote the story missed a trick. For, had s/he searched a little further, s/he would have come across the Marilyn Monroe-JFK-UFO memo.[4]

This purports to be notes made from a transcript of a phone-tap of a conversation between journalist Dorothy Kilgallen and her friend Howard Rothberg. It includes this paragraph:

“Rothberg indicated in so many words, that she [Marilyn Monroe] had secrets to tell, no doubt arising from her trists [*sic*] with the President and the Attorney General. One such ‘secret’ mentions the visit by the President at a secret air base for the purpose of inspecting things from outer space. Kilgallen replied that she knew what might be the source of visit. In the mid-fifties Kilgallen learned of secret effort by US and UK governments to identify the origins of crashed spacecraft and dead bodies, from a British government official. Kilgallen believed the story may have come from the New Mexico story in the late forties. Kilgallen said that if the story is true, it would cause terrible embarrassment for Jack and his plans to have NASA put men on the moon.”

Did JFK really talk about national security issues with Marilyn Monroe? This seems implausible to me, and one second-hand source, quoting Rothberg, says the document is a fake.[5] It hardly matters. If you look carefully at the fuzzy, often photocopied text,[6] right at the bottom on the left is what appears to be “MJ-12”. Yes, the “M” is indistinct, but the ‘J-12’ is quite legible. It’s another product of the Majestic disinformation mill!

GETTY IMAGES / HULTON ARCHIVE / EVENING STANDARD

NOTES

1 Google “NSAM 271” for details.
2 See http://on.msnbc.com/hWyGRr (msnbc.msn.com).
3 The “burned memo” is displayed at http://bit.ly/eDYtRh (bibliotecapleyades.net).
4 See http://bit.ly/fanqlS (blackmesapress.com).
5 http://bit.ly/ig5NFI (thedisclosureproject-steelmagnolia.blogspot.com).
6 See http://bit.ly/eJiWCY (ufosnw.com).

RELIC ROUND-UP

Holy souvenirs include barbs from Jesus's crucifixion headdress, nails from the Cross and a painted icon showing the sacred visage

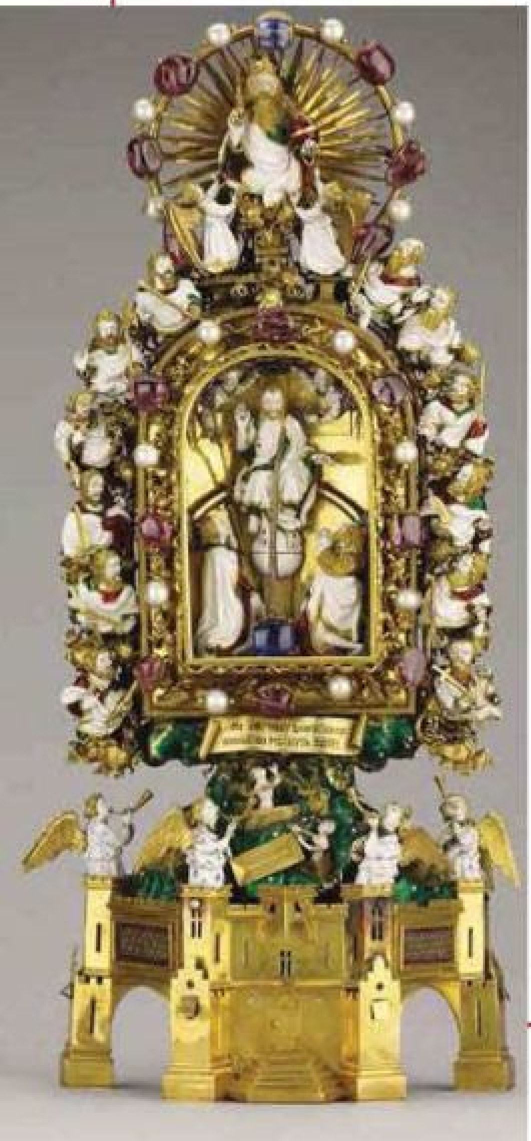
HOLY THORNS TO BE EXHIBITED

Three thorns said to be from the Crown of Thorns forced upon Jesus at the Crucifixion are to go on display at the British Museum in the exhibition *Treasures of Heaven*.

Legend has it that the Crown of Thorns was dug up in AD 326 in the tomb of Jesus in Jerusalem by St Helena, mother of the Emperor Constantine, and taken to Constantinople. In the 13th century, Baldwin II, expelled as Latin Emperor of Constantinople and in desperate need of cash, sold it to Louis IX (St Louis), King of France (in a deal brokered by the Venetians). To avoid the sin of trafficking in holy goods, Baldwin "freely" gave the relic to Louis, who in return "freely" offered him the vast sum of 177,300 (or 135,000) livres, making it the most expensive object in Europe, if not the world. The Crown – at that time said to have 60 or 70 thorns remaining – arrived on 19 August 1238 in Paris, where the king built a new chapel to house it and other relics (such as the Spear of Longinus, a fragment of Jesus's shroud and some of Mary's milk). This was the Sainte-Chapelle, the largest and most magnificent reliquary ever fashioned, completed in 1248. Louis and his successors claimed the privilege of detaching single thorns whenever they wished to make especially important gifts. (In a similar manner, Charles VI later distributed the ribs of his ancestor Louis I, "the Pious", as gifts to friends who attended a royal dinner.) The Sainte-Chapelle was sacked in 1793 and its relics dispersed.

One thorn to be exhibited was given to Mary Queen of Scots when she married the Dauphin of France in 1558. He ascended the throne as Francis II in 1559, and Mary became Queen Consort until she was widowed in 1560, after which she returned to Edinburgh. Following her execution in 1587, the thorn – which has Mary's pearls wrapped around it – passed from her courtier Thomas Percy to his daughter, Elizabeth Woodruff, who in 1600 gave it to her confessor, a Jesuit priest. The Jesuits took it to their college at St Omer in the Spanish Netherlands, founded in 1593 and relocated in 1794 to Stonyhurst Hall in rural Lancashire, where it is still placed in the chapel every year during Holy Week. (Another relic, held in St Michael's Church in Ghent, Belgium, also lays claim to be the Holy Thorn given to Mary Queen of Scots.)

Treasures of Heaven, which runs from 23 June to 9 October, is about saints, relics and devotion in mediæval Europe, and will feature objects from 40 institutions, including fragments of the True Cross and the foot of St Blaise. *"The Month", April 1882, pp540–556; "Relics and Shrines" by David Sox (1985); "Restless Bones" by James Bentley (1985); indcatholicnews.com, dailymail.co.uk, 24 Mar; Independent, 6 April 2011.*



LEFT: Holy Thorn Reliquary of Jean, Duc de Berry, Paris, France, prior to AD 1397.

© THE TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

GETTY IMAGES / LIOR MIZRAHI

CRUCIFIXION NAILS "FOUND IN TOMB"

Two of the nails used to crucify Jesus have been discovered in a first-century tomb, according to documentary maker Simcha Jacobovici. The bent and rusty iron nails (above), about 2in (5cm) long, were found in 1990 in a tomb outside Jerusalem that contained a number of ossuaries (bone boxes). Shortly after the excavation, the tomb was resealed and the artefacts disappeared, but Jacobovici claims to have tracked them down to an anthropologist's laboratory in Tel Aviv. Two of the ossuaries were inscribed with the name Caiaphas, the name of the Jewish high priest who presided over Christ's trial and crucifixion, according to the Bible. Jacobovici, whose documentary *The Nails of the Cross* aired on the History Channel on 20 April, claims that the high priest might have wanted the nails buried alongside his body for their talismanic powers and as divine protection in the afterlife. The whole story has been dismissed as a publicity stunt. The Israel Antiquities Authority said that it had never been proven that the tomb was the burial place of the high priest. Even if it were, why would a man such as Caiaphas venerate the nails used to execute a heretical troublemaker like the Nazarene? *D.Telegraph, 13 April 2011.*

CHRIST'S PORTRAIT

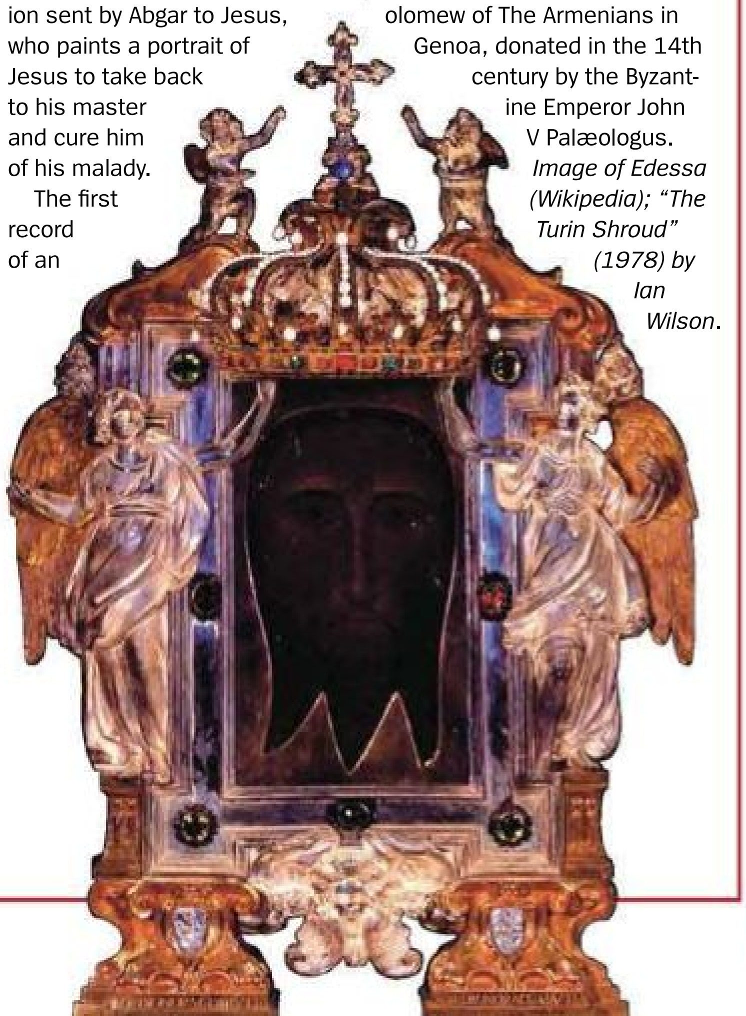
The centrepiece of the British Museum exhibition is an image of Jesus described misleadingly in press reports as the Mandylion of Edessa. This painting on a wooden board (facing, bottom), set in a Baroque frame in 1623, was kept in Rome's church of San Silvestro in Capite until 1870 before being moved to the Pope's private Matilda chapel in the Vatican palace. The earliest record of its existence comes from 1517, when its exhibition was forbidden to avoid competition with the Veil of Veronica or *sudarium*. The latter was a famous relic bearing an image of Jesus described as *acheiropoietos* (Greek for "not made by human hands" – anglicised as acheropite.) According to late mediæval legend, Veronica (meaning "true image") encountered Jesus as he dragged the cross on the Via Dolorosa and wiped the sweat and blood from His face with her veil, which was miraculously imprinted with an image of His face. The incident was made the sixth of the 14 Stations of the Cross. The earliest positive reference to "the *sudarium* of Christ which is called Veronica" is in 1143, although Pope Sergius IV is known to have consecrated an altar to it in 1011. The relic was seized by the troops of Charles V who sacked Rome in 1527, and was last heard of being touted round the city's taverns by drunken soldiers. Maybe it will turn up again and be returned to its silver reliquary, still kept in the sacristy of St Peter's in Rome.

The Mandylion of Edessa is an acheropite with a much earlier tradition, and may even be the origin of the Veronica story. The Eastern Orthodox Church regards this "holy napkin" as the very first *ikon*. The word *mandylion* derives from the Latin *mantele* (towel or napkin), via the Arabic *mandil*, with the diminutive suffix *–ion*. According to a legend recorded by Bishop Eusebius of Cæsarea in about AD 325, King Abgar V of Edessa (now the Turkish city of Urfa) wrote to Jesus, asking him to come and cure him of an illness (later specified as leprosy). Jesus wrote back declining the invitation but promising a future visit by a disciple. Following the crucifixion, the apostle "Thaddeus" came to Edessa bearing the words of Jesus, by virtue of which the king was cured and converted to Christianity. The image of Christ first appears around AD 400 in the story in a Syriac work called the *Doctrine of Addai* [Thaddeus], which introduces Hannan (Ananias), a court painter among a delegation sent by Abgar to Jesus, who paints a portrait of Jesus to take back to his master and cure him of his malady.

The first record of an actual physical image in Edessa was in *Ecclesiastic History* by Evagrius Scholasticus (AD 593). The painting from the *Doctrine of Addai* now becomes an acheropite of Christ that gave miraculous aid during the defence of Edessa against the Persians in 544. In this version of the legend, Hannan was unable to paint Christ because he was dazzled by divine light; so Christ wiped His face on a towel after washing Himself, leaving an indelible image. This cloth was taken to Constantinople in 944, whence it disappeared in 1204 during the Fourth Crusade. An alternative legend has the Mandylion (or a fragment of it) purchased by Louis I and put in Sainte Chapelle along with the Crown of Thorns… before vanishing with the other relics during the French Revolution. Another intriguing possibility, explored by Ian Wilson, is that the Mandylion was what we now call the Shroud of Turin, folded in such a way to show only the head and shoulders.

Besides the portrait of Jesus in the British Museum exhibition, another icon resembling the Mandylion (or the Veronica) is kept in the Church of St Bartholomew of The Armenians in Genoa, donated in the 14th century by the Byzantine Emperor John V Palæologus.

Image of Edessa (Wikipedia); "The Turin Shroud" (1978) by Ian Wilson.



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Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

142. SPARTAN INFANTICIDE

The myth

Unhealthy or disabled babies born to the militaristic Spartans were thrown off a cliff. Sparta carried no passengers.

DON'T WORRY– THEY'RE ONLY DRAWINGS

The "truth"

The apothetes, or pit, at the foot of the cliff in question, near Mount Taygete, was excavated by archæologists in the 2000s. Long analysis of the findings found plenty of bones – but none of them belonged to infants. Instead they were all identified, by researchers from the Athens Faculty of Medicine, as having come from men between the ages of 18 and 35, who died in the 5th and 6th centuries BC. This supports the belief that criminals, traitors and prisoners of war were indeed executed in this manner – but not babies. The myth seems to have begun with, or to have been popularised by, Plutarch writing long afterwards, in the first century AD. The attractions of the story are clear: it can show either how barbaric the Spartans were, or else the necessity and rewards of ruthlessness, depending on the particular propaganda needs of the teller.

Sources

http://bit.ly/dYztDb (abc.net.au)

Disclaimer

Just because they haven't found any bones, does that mean there weren't any? As ever, you are invited to disagree and discuss, without mercy, through the letters page.

Mythchaser

FIRST CLASS

Have you ever heard of the Soot-Bag Men? It's sometimes said that when different classes of carriage were introduced to the railways in the mid-19th century, the rail companies hit an unexpected problem: passengers who could well afford to travel First Class were choosing the cheaper option. To persuade the rich traveller to stick to First, the railways employed chimney sweeps to travel in Third Class carriages, in the hope that their sooty presence and proletarian manners would deter posh cheapskates from joining them. Did this really happen? And if so, did it work?

FOR MORE MYTHCONCEPTIONS, GO TO:
www.forteantimes.com/strangedays/mythbusters

NECROLOG

We note the passing of a sect founder who had millions of followers in India and in the West, and of a forensic expert called in on famous and contentious murder enquiries.

GETTY IMAGES / AFP / TEKEE TANWAR

SATHYA SAI BABA

One of the most remarkable religious figures of the last century, with about three million followers worldwide, Sathya Narayana Raju (as he then was) was born in the village of Puttaparthi in Andhra Pradesh, India. It is said that his mother claimed he came into the world by virgin birth. According to legend, as a child he would avoid places where animals were slaughtered and bring beggars home to be fed. Aged 14, after apparently being bitten by a scorpion, he displayed signs of delirium and hallucinations. Thinking him possessed, his parents summoned a local exorcist who shaved the boy's head, scored four Xs into his scalp, and poured the juice of garlic and lime into the wounds. Shortly afterwards, he was miraculously able to speak Sanskrit, and on 20 October 1940 declared himself to be a reincarnation of Sai Baba of Shirdi (c.1835–1918), a popular saint equally venerated by Hindus and Muslims. Challenged to prove his claim, Sathya is said to have thrown some jasmine flowers on the floor; in falling they arranged themselves to spell out the name "Sai Baba" in Telugu. (Sai Baba means something like "holy father" or "saintly old man".)

Shirdi Sai Baba stated on his deathbed that he would be reincarnated in eight years, that is in 1926, the year that Sathya Sai Baba claimed to have been born – although his school records imply he was born in 1923. Sathya also claimed to have received his driving licence at the age of nine. He left his family and travelled throughout southern India, gathering followers around him, and in 1950 he inaugurated his first ashram near Puttaparthi, called Prasanthi Nilayam (Abode of Peace). He professed his mission was ecumenical, but his message was essentially drawn from Hindu teachings about man and God being inseparable by virtue of the atman, or eternal soul – the "universal divine spark" present in all beings. The atman, he declared, "can be known only through love" – a philosophy that he distilled in the maxim: "Love all, serve all. All men then are God."

Part of his popularity may be explained by his non-doctrinal approach. In contrast to many sects, followers were not required to give up their previous religious beliefs. To his devotees, Sai Baba was an avatar, an incarnation of God in human form. He become India's premier avatar or god-man, eclipsing the likes of Maharishi and Rajneesh (Osho) who had first drawn Westerners east in the Sixties and Seventies.

His reputation was founded largely on his apparent ability to materialise tokens of devotion – such as amulets, rings, pendants, and Rolex watches – out of thin air. He also seemed to produce *vibhuti* or "holy" ash in prodigious amounts from his fingertips and to manifest fully formed lingams (in his case ellipsoids of crystal or quartz) from his stomach by regurgitation. Rationalists said that these were tricks that could be replicated by any competent street magician, but some witnesses who started out as sceptics, such as the journalist Mick Brown, were won over. Sai Baba refused to be examined scientifically, explaining that his powers were "part of the unlimited power of God. You call them miracles, but for me they are just my way."

Sai Baba had a huge following, with ashrams in more than 126 countries, and by the 1990s the tiny village of Puttaparthi had grown into a town with an airport. The guru, a stocky figure in a red robe, his head crowned in a frizzy halo of black hair, would appear twice a day for *darshan* in the ashram's main temple. He would move among the adoring crowds, sometimes "materialising" *vibhuti* into outstretched hands. His followers would frequently talk of miraculous healings, of being called to him in dreams and visions, and of Sai Baba being able to read their minds (all dismissed by sceptics as self-delusion and the employment of "cold reading").

Sai Baba established an extensive network of schools and colleges throughout India and his programme of Education in Human Values (EHV) was adopted in schools in Europe and America. In 1991, he inaugurated the Sathya Sai Super-Speciality Hospital, which provides a range of medical services, up to major heart surgery, free of charge to local villagers. This was funded by an American follower, Isaac Tigrett, co-founder of the Hard Rock chain of restaurants. On his 70th birthday, Sai Baba inaugurated the Rayalaseema water project, which was to provide water to more than 750 villages and several towns in Andhra Pradesh – although little of this has materialised.

In June 1993, four armed men broke into Sai Baba's private rooms and murdered his chauffeur and cook, but he escaped unscathed; police shot the intruders dead. It was rumoured that the assassination attempt was the result of a struggle between rival factions of devotees who had been denied influential positions in the ashram. There were allegations that Sai Baba had sexually abused young male devotees during private audiences, but these charges were not convincing. An international campaign called for his prosecution, but he seemed impervious to criticism, perhaps because there were many high-ranking politicians and public figures among his followers.

Following his death, the Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, issued a statement saying: "Sri Sathya Sai Baba was a spiritual leader who inspired millions to lead a moral and meaningful life, even as they followed the religion of their choice. The nation deeply mourns his passing away." Andhra Pradesh state declared four days of mourning. According to *The Hindu* (24 April), the Trust that will now run his estate (variously estimated to be worth between $5.5 and 8.9 billion) is riven by conflict, so the job of appointing a chairman is likely to be a prolonged public spectacle, at least on the Indian sub-continent.

In 1963, Sai Baba announced that he would live until 2020, so he was wrong about that. It remains to be seen whether another prediction is closer to the mark – that in 2023 his "third incarnation", Prema Sai, will be born in the village of Gunaparthy in Karnataka state and "receive universal recognition from mankind".

Sathya Sai Baba, Indian swami, born Puttaparthi, Andhra Pradesh, (allegedly) on 23 Nov 1926; died Puttaparthi 24 April 2011, aged (?) 84.

DAVID BOWEN

As head of forensic medicine at the Charing Cross Hospital in London (1973–89) and professor of forensic medicine at London University (1977–89), David Bowen investigated some 500 cases of murder and suspicious deaths. In 1983, his identification of strips of skin from a drain in Muswell Hill, north London, as human led to the arrest of the serial killer Dennis Nilsen. He also investigated the murders of Ross McWhirter, co-founder of the *Guinness Book of Records* (1975); Blair Peach at an anti-racism demo (1979); and PC Keith Blakelock at the Broadwater Farm estate, Tottenham (1985). In 1999, he was asked to provide a report on the case of Roberto Calvi, head of Italy's Banco Ambrosiano and known as "God's banker" because of his close ties to the Vatican, who was found hanged below Blackfriars Bridge over the Thames in 1982 [**FT39:50**]. The police said it was suicide, but Bowen concluded that Calvi had been forcibly taken to the bridge, possibly by boat, and was the victim of foul play. In 2007, five Italians tried for Calvi's murder were acquitted.

Bowen also investigated the mysterious 1987 death in Spandau Prison, West Berlin, of Hitler's wartime deputy, Rudolf Hess, aged 93 [**FT64:34**]. He scrutinised two separate post-mortem reports, one prepared on behalf of the Four Powers (US, UK, Soviet Union and France) and the other drawn up on behalf of Hess's family. The Four Powers believed Hess had hanged himself with electrical cord he had found in a shed, but Bowen agreed with Hess's son that it was murder. Suicidal hanging, Bowen noted, usually leaves few marks on the neck or internal tissues because of the inevitably short drop. In Hess's case the autopsy had found bruising in the deeper neck tissues. Such bruising, Bowen reasoned, while unlikely to occur in a case of hanging, is a feature of strangulation. Bruising to the top of the head – again as found in Hess's case – is also unlikely to occur in hanging.

David Aubrey Llewellyn Bowen, forensic pathologist, born Pontycymmer, South Wales 31 Jan 1924; died 31 Mar 2011, aged 87.

FOR MORE STRANGE DEATHS GO TO:
www.forteantimes.com/strangedays/strangedeaths

Strange deaths

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

THERE WAS A VERY GOOD REASON WHY A man's body was not found in his car for a week earlier this year: the vehicle had been buried under several feet of snow. Kevin Ronan, 36, from Long Island, was uncovered in the early hours of 1 February 2011 in Flushing, New York, after his brother recognised his car. He had apparently shot himself in the head with a shotgun, which was found on the seat beside him. The last time his family saw him was on 25 January when he stormed out of his relatives' home threatening to kill himself. He was reported missing that same day. *dailymail.co.uk, 1 Feb; NY Post, 2 Feb 2011*.

A LAOTIAN MAN AGED 38 LURED HIS 24-YEAR-old pregnant wife into a forest in northeast Xieng Khuang province on 3 January and killed her with an axe blow to the back. He told police he wanted to use the three-month-old fœtus to make a lucky charm called a "louk lord". He confessed to the police, telling them that he had heard that if he "produced a louk lord, he would be able to ask the ghosts for lucky lottery numbers". He refused to say what he had done with the fœtus. ***MX News (Sydney), NY Post, 19 Jan 2011.***

JUDSON NEWTON, 43, WENT BOATING WITH friends off Jaw Beach on New Providence Island in the Bahamas on 29 August 2010 and had engine problems. (The beach was so named because one of the *Jaws* movies was filmed there.) Rescuers found three men aboard who said that Mr Newton and another friend had swum to shore. Neither of them was found until fishermen caught a 12ft (3.6m) tiger shark on 4 September and cut it open. Human remains were found in its stomach and identified by fingerprints as belonging to Mr Newton. *Metro, 17 Sept 2010*.

WILLIAM BEATON, 89, celebrated his 70th wedding anniversary by dancing with his wife – then collapsed from a fatal heart attack. He had been holding his wife Peggy, 87, in his arms just moments earlier as family members took photographs. They were enjoying a meal at the Vine Inn, Romsey, Hampshire, where a Frank Sinatra impersonator serenaded them. Great-grandfather Mr Beaton died four days later in hospital. "He died a happy man surrounded by those he loved," said his granddaughter. ***Metro, Sun, 4 Mar 2011.***

TERRY COLON

A WOMAN DIED AFTER AN ALLERGIC ATTACK thought to have been triggered by a dentist's mouthwash. Sacha Rumaner, 30, from Brighton, was having her teeth cleaned on 2 February and was not even under anæsthetic when she went into anaphylactic shock. Dental staff said she had complained of feeling hot and having an itchy leg moments before she lost consciousness. She was pronounced dead before she could be taken to the Royal Sussex County Hospital nearby. A consultant allergist said serious reactions to mouthwash were very rare, but could be caused by a chemical antiseptic, chlorhexidine, which is used in some brands. *D.Mail, Metro, 23 Mar 2011*.

BARRIE HEPBURN, 65, WAS LEFT WHEELCHAIR-bound after his neighbour shot him three times in 2000 following an argument in his holiday home in the South of France. The retired property developer, married to Harley Street hypnotherapist Susan Hepburn, had subsequently suffered bouts of depression and twice attempted suicide. On 29 August 2010, while his wife was in New York, he tried to amputate his legs using a hacksaw and a Stanley knife, with iodine to sterilise the wound and a plastic bag to use as a tourniquet. He was able to cut into his legs because he had no feeling in them. Later, he rang emergency services and was found dead in his kitchen in St John's Wood, north London, after losing a huge amount of blood. A hacksaw was embedded in his right leg and there was another cut the same size on the other side of the leg. ***D.Mail, Metro, 18 Mar 2011.***

the UFO files

FORTEAN TIMES presents our monthly section featuring regular sighting reports, reviews of classic cases, entries on major ufological topics and hands-on advice for UFO investigators. **The UFO Files** will benefit from your input, so don't hesitate to submit your suggestions and questions.

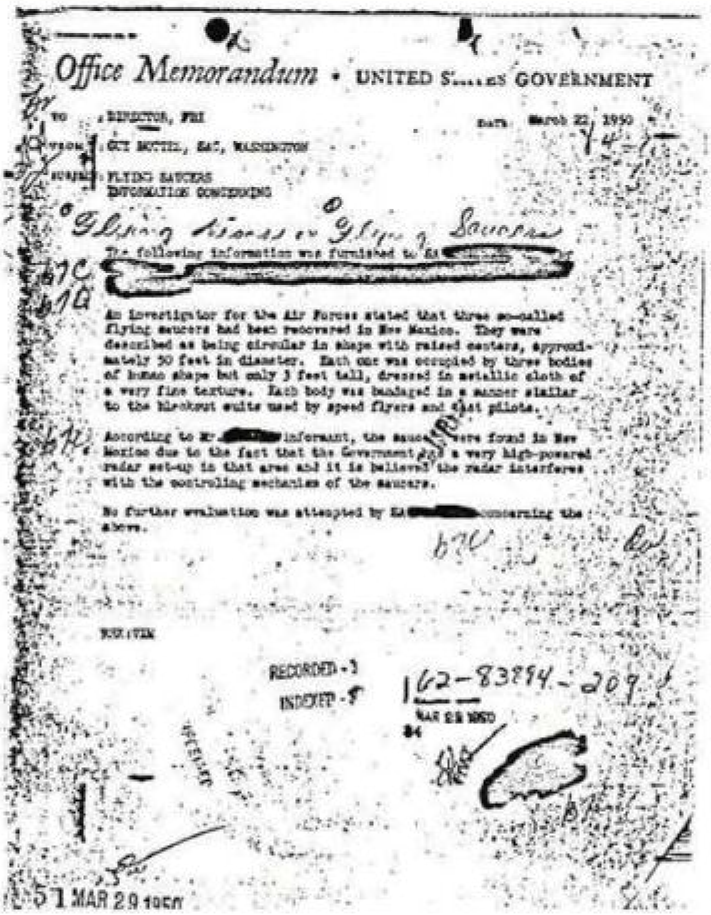
To contact **The UFO Files**, write to: **nufon@btinternet.com** or **UFO Files, Fortean Times, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD**.

FLYINGSAUCERY

ANDY ROBERTS & DR DAVID CLARKE PRESENT THEIR REGULAR SURVEY OF THE LATEST FADS AND FLAPS FROM THE WORLD OF UFOLOGY

THE FIB-FILES

The silly season has arrived early this year. Either that or the tabloids are so desperate to publish UFO stories that any old rubbish will do, as the recent fuss about FBI documents demonstrates. In April, it was claimed the US crime-busting agency had released a cache of new files, including a 1950 document relating to the infamous Roswell incident. The story was based upon a note, written by FBI agent Guy Hottel that refers to three "so-called flying saucers" that a source claimed had crash-landed in New Mexico and contained the bodies of 3ft (90cm)-tall humanoids. Bonnie Malkin of the *Daily Telegraph* claimed this document was "one of thousands of previously unreleased files that the FBI has made public in a new online resource called The Vault." In reality, the FBI had simply re-jigged their online reading room to make it easier for visitors to search for information that had been in the public domain for decades. As sceptic Ben Radford pointed out, the Hottel memo "is not secret, nor is it new, nor does it refer to anything that happened in Roswell". Once again, news organisations had fallen for a 60-year-old hoax. The rumour referred to in the Hottel memo was spread by a confidence trickster, Silas Newton, and became the central theme of Frank Scully's book *Behind the Flying Saucers*, published in 1950. The saucer crash referred to in the book was in Aztec, New Mexico, not Roswell. But one item from the FBI Vault should be no surprise to those familiar with the content of the British MoD's UFO files. It appears in a policy briefing sent to J Edgar Hoover, FBI Director, in August 1949. It says the agency's San Antonio office regularly destroyed UFO reports on the grounds that they arrived "in great numbers" and contained "nothing of FBI interest". It continues: "… it is pointed out that the filing of these [reports] would result in the rapid accumulation of very bulky files." For those who want a more detailed examination of this confusion, that scourge of ufological nonsense, Isaac Koi's site (isaackoi.com), is well worth a look. *Sun, D.Mail, D.Telegraph, Guardian, 10 April 2011*; http://vault.fbi.gov/ (FBI Vault); http://bit.ly/g51Qva (abovetopsecret.com).



Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : DIRECTOR, FBI DATE: March 22, 1950

FROM : GUY HOTTEL, SAC, WASHINGTON

SUBJECT: FLYING SAUCERS
INFORMATION CONCERNING

Flying Discs or Flying Saucers

The following information was furnished to SA [redacted]

b7C
b7D

An investigator for the Air Forces stated that three so-called flying saucers had been recovered in New Mexico. They were described as being circular in shape with raised centers, approximately 50 feet in diameter. Each one was occupied by three bodies of human shape but only 3 feet tall, dressed in metallic cloth of a very fine texture. Each body was bandaged in a manner similar to the blackout suits used by speed flyers and test pilots.

According to Mr. [redacted] informant, the saucers were found in New Mexico due to the fact that the Government has a very high-powered radar set-up in that area and it is believed the radar interferes with the controlling mechanism of the saucers.

No further evaluation was attempted by SA [redacted] concerning the above.

b7C

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RECORDED - 3
INDEXED - 5

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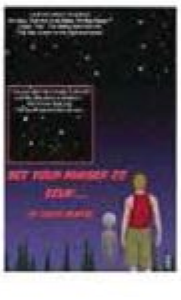
MAR 28 1950

57 MAR 29 1950

ARE WE NEARLY THERE YET?

The contentious Betty and Barney Hill UFO abduction that took place at Indian Head, New Hampshire, in September 1961 is regarded by many as the Ur-abduction. Despite detailed criticism, notably by Karl Pflock and Peter Brookesmith, the case still exerts a considerable gravitational pull on ufology. The aspect of the case that many people are fascinated by is the 'star map' – literally a map of stars shown to the Hills by their alien abductors. From being a ufologists' Rorschach test onto which all kinds of wishful thinking could be projected, the star map has been slowly hammered into a more specific kind of meaning. Schoolteacher Marjorie Fish started the ball rolling by suggesting the star map was from the perspective of the double star system of Zeta Reticuli, an idea that embedded itself deep within ufology as it gave credence to the notion that extraterrestrials from that location were behind the Hills' and subsequent abductions. Now Stephen Pearse, writing in his new book *Set Your Phaser To Stun* has turned Fish's ideas upside down, proposing that the star map is Earth-centred, and uncovering "the fact that some of our closest neighbourhood stars are linked in a network of trade and exploration by a highly advanced extraterrestrial civilization that is less than 50 light years away from us". Now read on… http://bit.ly/kvqfHA (alienjigsaw.com); http://bit.ly/iF2j8B (anomalistbooks.com).


SET YOUR PHASER TO STUN

EARTHLIGHT IN JAPAN

An unidentified light was captured on film following the recent devastating earthquake in Japan, giving rise to suggestions it may have been an earthlight. On 7 April 2011, an aftershock registering 7.1 on the Richter scale was recorded 40 miles (64.4km) east of Sendai and on the same fault line as Japan's major earthquake earlier in the year. The light was reported in the media as a possible earthlight, a luminescence caused by the geological stresses which often culminate in an earthquake. Dr David Robinson, an earthquake researcher at Oxford University, has noted: "The idea is that just before an earthquake you might get some build-up of stress just prior to the event. People have invented all kinds of mechanisms whereby this stress gets released as an electromagnetic excitation of the upper atmosphere, which can cause things like lights appearing, similar to the Northern Lights", adding sceptically, "Anything which is caused by an unknown mechanism is dubious." Fair comment, but lights occurring during quakes have been reported throughout history. Researcher Paul Devereux has investigated numerous instances of suspected earthlights in regions across the world, and is convinced the mechanism for their appearance lies in a wide variety of geophysical causes, and may even be "macro-quantal events – phenomena that should exist only at the subatomic quantum level, but have somehow manifested on our larger macro-scale of experience". Phew! But even the sceptical Dr Robinson was quick to qualify his doubts: "Just because they can't be explained doesn't necessarily make them not true. But until anyone comes up with a plausible mechanism it will be on the fringes of earthquake study." http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oKv9nEvhLDQ; http://www.pauldevereux.co.uk/.

UFO CASEBOOK

JENNY RANDLES REPORTS ON THE DANGERS OF FLASHING LIGHTS INTO THE SKIES.

WHEN UFOS TAKE THE BLAME

Some years ago when I was at college (yes, *that* long ago!) I used to bike 10 miles (16km) to south Manchester by crossing the Manchester Ship Canal. In the late 1970s, the canal still had commercial shipping and had lock gates at Irlam, where I had to get off and walk across the barrier. One day I was very late and had to excuse my tardiness by explaining that this was because of an enemy submarine. Needless to say, nobody believed my story; my tutor even wondered why I didn't blame a flying saucer instead. But I was being truthful. The foreign naval sub was passing the lock at just the wrong moment and the tricky manœuvre delayed my journey considerably.

This experience came to mind following two recent reports in the *Manchester Evening News*. Both concerned disturbing cases that led to prosecutions in court – and both also involved UFOs being blamed.

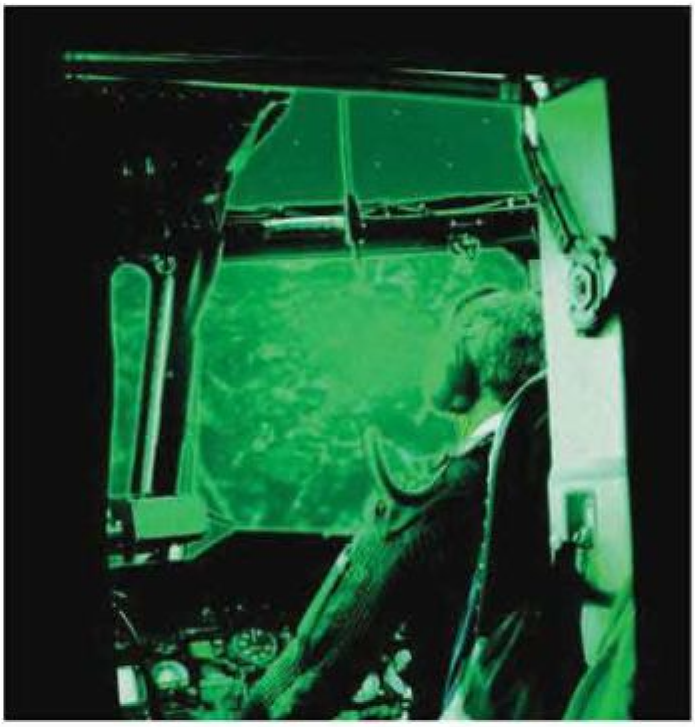
The first incident occurred on 14 March 2011 and involved a 27-year-old man accused of 'attacking' India 99, a police helicopter. He had done so by shining a high-power laser beam that went directly into the cockpit as it was on a routine patrol over Blackley, North Manchester.

Police officers in the chopper said that the beam was very distracting and could have easily led to them losing control – though, thankfully, no harm ensued. The witness admitted the offence, though not any ill intent, and wrote a letter of apology once he realised what he had accidentally done. He claimed to have found the pen-like device on the street a few days earlier, it being so powerful that safe use normally required on-the-job training.

The defendant justified his action of firing the laser skywards towards the hovering lights by telling the court that he had heard local chatter about UFO sightings in north Manchester and then saw this strange glowing 'object' as he walked towards the local shop. He was beaming generally towards it, seemingly in the hope of response from the object, unaware that he was targeting a low-flying helicopter, or indeed in such a way that the pilot could be distracted.

Despite the acceptance of the man's plea that he now deeply regretted his actions, there was an obvious risk posed here. This led to the court imposing a community service order on the young man to discourage him from contemplating such an act again.

A few days later, there was a virtual rerun before Bolton crown court, although this case had occurred first (on 21 September 2010). This time, two older men were charged with the offence of shining a green laser into the cockpit of a GMP (police) helicopter with three crew present, temporarily blinding the pilot for long enough that he lost the ability to use his instrumentation. The GMP officer had to hurriedly switch to autopilot as he passed over a well-populated area near Bury, Lancashire.



ETIENNE GILFILLAN

A green laser briefly blinded a copter pilot who lost control

After being identified by thermal imaging, the two men were traced by officers on the ground and proved to be cousins who had just been checking out which one had the most powerful laser during an impromptu UFO watch. The men were stated to have a long-held interest in UFOs and the paranormal, and seem simply not to have foreseen any possible repercussions from this new way of seeking out ET. The idea to use the pens as a means of UFO-hunting had – the court was told – been 'fostered' after reading an unspecified book. While they admitted that it was a foolish thing to do, the potentially grave consequences of their actions meant that both were given suspended prison sentences as well as community service orders.

These cases do present some sobering concerns about the UFO phenomenon and how we share a responsibility for the way we approach our interest in it. I presume that the author of the book in question did not advocate use of lasers in the way they were operated here, but it reminds us that what we say and do in any context can inspire others in ways that we might never imagine. When I look back at some of the things I've written over the years, I realise that I should have been more aware of how my words might be interpreted. As a writer, *you* tend to know what you mean, but can innocently provide opportunities for misunderstanding. Indeed, misinterpretation is practically the motto of the entire UFO movement!

But, as I said earlier, just because an explanation sounds absurd does not mean that it is untrue. With UFOs (and strange phenomena generally), we live in a world where the improbable and bizarre is, nonetheless, a frequent occurrence.

These incidents also dovetail with the long-running saga of Gary McKinnon, who hacked into highly secret US computer files to pursue his own interest in finding 'hidden' evidence for UFOs and aliens (**FT169:13** and *passim*). Like the laser users in Manchester, McKinnon simply hadn't appreciated the possible consequences of taking this enthusiasm too far.

Each day, our technology takes new steps forward into areas that we could never have imagined. And it adds limitations on what we should say and do – making the 'Code of Practice' voluntarily thrashed out over 25 years ago by British UFO researchers a prescient concept (it inspired the BUFORA ban on regression hypnosis, for a start).

When I was last at a BUFORA meeting in the mid-1990s, ufology could only really be pursued in the old-fashioned way: interviewing witnesses, phoning airports, and doggedly chasing leads via post. These days, you can track aircraft flights in real time or watch live streaming camera feeds from UFO hot spots and skywatch from your armchair.

Shining lights into the sky in the hope of making a UFO respond has been something reported by witnesses for decades, and I'm sure that I have written about such incidents before. Now we have to bear in mind that some people consider a laser beam as simply a modern flashlight, without any appreciation as to why there is a difference in degree that could be catastrophic.

CODA

It was many years ago that I first remember a witness using a UFO 'excuse' when confronted by the police. A man had been stopped for speeding across the countryside in the dead of night while wearing little more than night attire. When asked to explain what he was up to, he justified his unusual activities with the story that he had just seen a UFO and was pursuing it fast before it got away.

Nice try, the police officer smiled, before cautioning the witness and suggesting he return home – a tad more slowly!

It turned out that this man really *had* seen a UFO. Unfortunately, it was probably just the planet Venus, spectacularly bright at the time and appearing to 'hover' unreachably far away.

While we must always temper honest enthusiasm for our subject with common sense and consideration for others, I doubt we have heard the last proclamation that UFOs are the reason for some less-than-wise behaviour.

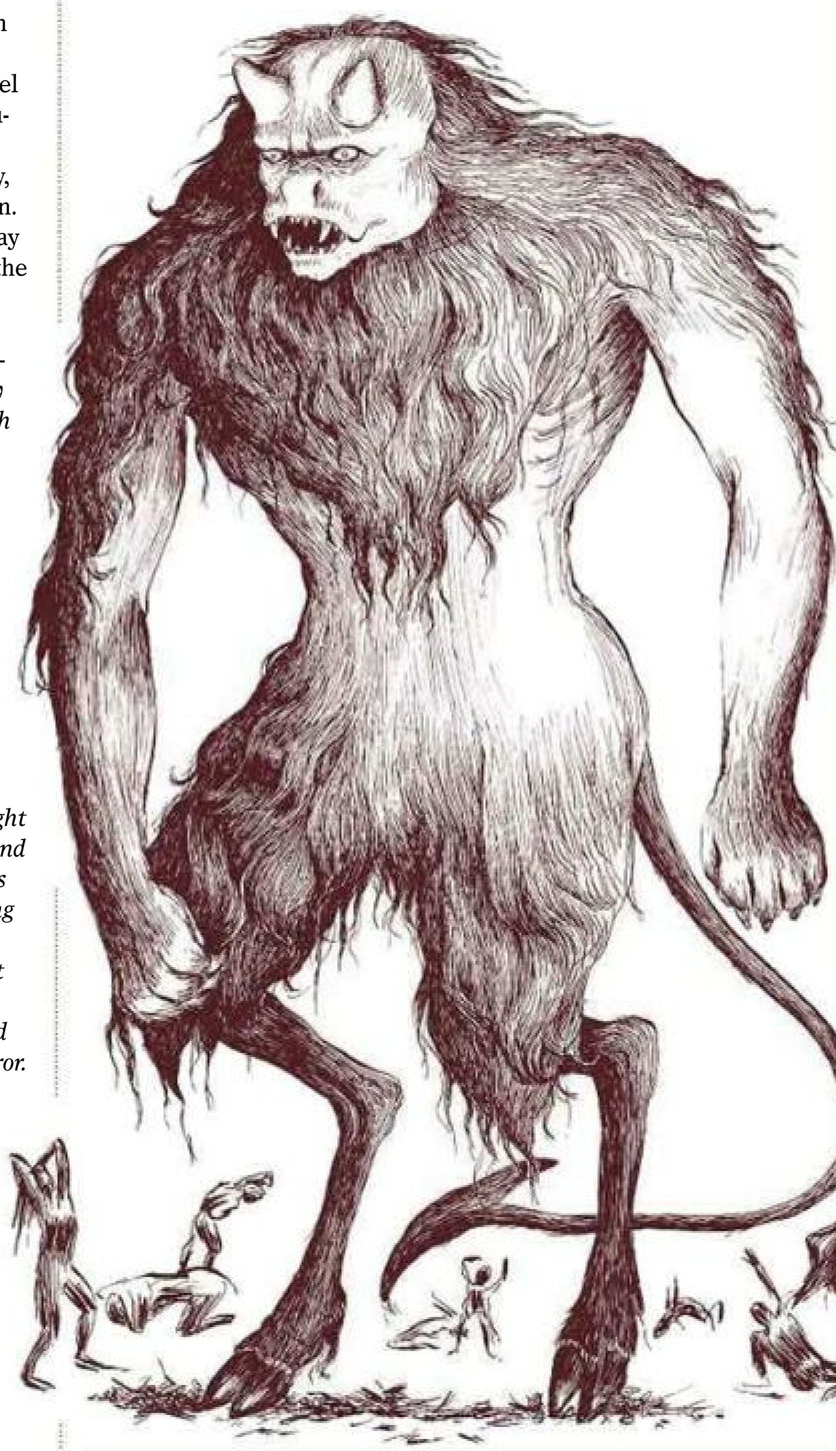
BLASTS FROM THE PAST

FORTEAN TIMES BRINGS YOU THE NEWS THAT TIME FORGOT

31

THE DEVIL OF BRACKEN COUNTY

THEO PAIJMANS uncovers a number of personal appearances by the superstar of evil in 19th-century America, and wonders if they could all have been clever burglary ruses – or something even stranger.



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

For the greater part of 1866, various American newspapers[1] printed a letter written by one Nathaniel G Squires and dated 17 February, chronicling the terror the inhabitants of Bracken county, Kentucky, found themselves in. It had all begun on the Monday night previous to his writing the letter. As Squires told it:

> *… after myself and family had retired to rest, we were suddenly aroused by a great outcry from the negro quarters – which are immediately to the rear of the house – in which prayers vied for supremacy with blasphemies, men, women and children screaming "fire!" and "murder!" at the top of their voices, all conspiring to create a scene worthy of a pandemonium. Terribly startled, my wife and I sprang from our bed. The room was illuminated as brightly as by a flood of sunlight, though the light was of a bluish cast. Our first and most reasonable conclusion was that the negro cabins were being consumed by fire. We rushed to the windows and beheld a sight that fairly curdled the blood in our veins with horror, and filled our hearts with the utmost terror. My daughter, shrieking loudly, came running into my room, hysterical with fear. This is what we beheld:*
>
> *Standing to the right of the upper cabin, near the fence that separates the negroes' garden from the house yard, was a creature of gigantic stature, and the most horrifying appearance. It was nearly as high as the comb of the cabin, and had a monstrous head not dissimilar in shape to that of an ape; two short very white horns appeared above each eye; its arms were long, covered with shaggy hair of an ashy hue, and terminated with huge paws, not unlike those of a cat, and armed with long and hooked claws. Its breast was as broad as that of a large sized ox. Its legs resembled the front legs of a horse, only the hoofs were cloven. It had a long tail, armed with a dart-shaped horn, which it was continually switching about. Its eyes glowed like two living coals of fire, while from its nostrils were emitted sheets of bluish coloured flame, with a hissing sound, like the hissing of a serpent, only a thousand times louder. Its general colour, save its arms, was a dull, dingy brown. The air was powerfully impregnated with a smell of burning sulphur… I do not know how long this monster, demon or devil, was visible after we reached the window – possibly some three seconds. When it vanished, it was enveloped in a spiral column of flame that reached nearly to the tops of the locust trees adjacent, and which hid his horrid form completely from view. The extinction of the flame was instantaneous, and with its disappearance we were relieved of the presence of this remarkable visitor.*

Squires would have been willing to believe that he and his family had experienced a horrible nightmare, but for the fact that all were awake at the time. Even so, he claimed, he might still have convinced himself that it had been some kind of hallucination – and wouldn't have written the letter – save that the creature was sighted at other places and by other witnesses:

> *… precisely the same apparition made its appearance at my neighbour's, Mrs Wm. Dole, appearing there in precisely the same shape in which it presented itself to us, save the head, which appeared to those who witnessed it at Mrs D.'s to resemble that of a horse. At Mr. Adam Fuqua's, another neighbour, its head was that of a vulture. On Tuesday night it appeared at Mr Jesse Bond's, there wearing the head of an elephant.*

"It was nearly as high as the comb of the cabin, and had a monstrous head not dissimilar to that of an ape; two short white horns appeared above each eye; its arms were long, hairy and clawed"

> *At all these places it made the same appearance as at my house – excepting only the changing of the head – and disappeared in the same manner.*[2]

The letter vouched for the reliability of the witnesses. As a postscript, a declaration drawn up by John G Finley, Justice of the Peace, was added, in which all the witnesses declared that the contents of Squires's letter were true and the persons involved certified by Finley as credible and reliable persons "and their statements entitled to full faith and credit". Every fortean, though, knows that these declarations are often found attached to all kinds of weird stories found in 19th-century newspapers and cannot be taken as any guarantee of the truthfulness of the tale.

The Devil of Bracken County, however, was just the start of a minor flap of similar devil sightings across the United States. Some two months after the events in Kentucky, something not unlike the Bracken County demon appeared in Brighton, a suburb of Chicago, Illinois:

> *It will doubtless be recollected that a veritable devil, with cloven hoofs, tail, flaming nostrils, and all the other traditional appurtenances of his Sable Majesty was produced a few weeks since in Kentucky, where he was 'seen of many men'. Our Chicago friends, not to be outdone in any other part of the globe, have secured the services of a first-class devil, who, if the following account, from the Post, is to be credited, first appeared in the suburb of Brighton:*
>
> *"The demon was sitting on a fence by the roadside, not far from the Brighton race course, smoking a short clay pipe – at least, he saw smoke issuing from his mouth and nostrils, and is disposed to believe it was tobacco smoke, although there was certainly a faint smell of brimstone in the air, and every whiff of smoke seemed to be accompanied by a little tongue of bluish flame." The creature was further described as "extremely hideous; his body, of Titanic size was covered with mail like the hide of a rhinoceros, full of great seams and scoriated like a field of lava, which it resembled in colour." No feet or hoofs were seen, but, as the horse shied away from the creature and nearly overturned the buggy, the rider did not have time to take a close look. When he did look back, the thing had vanished. "If it was not Satan, our friend is at a loss to imagine what it was." That the description did not exactly match that of what was seen at Bracken county, was explained as follows: "it is known – if it is not known it is believed – that the demon has power to assume a variety of shapes, or, as he seems to have done at Brighton, to divest himself of any shape or substance. We do not choose to vouch, however, for the verity of the Brighton devil, whose actuality rests upon the testimony of a single witness.*[3]

I found a brief mention of something similar seen at Missouri during this time, and a larger account of the appearance of a devil-monster in Middletown, New York State:

> *… It appears that he has gone to Middletown, New York. He is a terrible monster. A contemporary says: "Amid electric, phosphoric and other red and blue lights, he suddenly appeared, entered the house, the doors and windows of which were quickly and violently thrown open, and presented to the affrighted natives a form which was 'neither man nor beast, but bearing, in huge, and distorted proportions, the shape and form of the upper extremities of the one, and the lower parts terribly elongated, and reeking with mire and filth and emitting a smell of phosphorous of the other.' He lifted his scaly wings, brushed them in the faces of the terrified mortals, and with a yell left through the back door and disappeared in the woods. – His course was tracked next day by the sulphur that he shook from his horrid hair. Doubtless he will [turn] up in jail one of these days."*[4]

As can be seen from the last remarks cited above, we leave the realm of the unexplained with the suggestion that a human agent was involved, and this seems to have been the case in regards to the devil of Bracken county. In April, several newspapers reported more news from Kentucky:

> *… the old-fashioned Satan with horns and tail is no longer at large… The 'Squier's family' and Mrs. Dole, and the rest of the Bracken county people, who were scared out of their wits and their moveable effects by this monstrous visitor, may rest in peace. The luminous eyes, the gnashing teeth, the scaly hide, the cloven feet, the horrid horns, the terrific tail, will trouble them no more forever. Satan is bound, and his name is Oden.*
>
> *A man bearing the name of Oden, a resident of Carlisle, Nicholas County, Kentucky, procured a horsehide, with which he clothed himself, and having furnished himself with a phosphorous substance, to imitate the devil's eyes of fire, started forth to alarm the timid. He would approach a dwelling, making a strange noise, causing the inmates to leave hurriedly. He would then enter the house and appropriate what valuables he could find. He was shot at repeatedly, but being protected by a coat of mail the shots failed to take effect. Finally, a number of persons surrounded and succeeded in lassoing him and he is now confined in the narrow walls of Carlisle jail, to answer to numerous charges for theft, which will be arrayed against him.*[5]

Imaginative as Oden's ruse was, he certainly was not the first to hatch such an elaborate scheme. Mike Dash has noted in his study of Spring-heeled Jack that in the 1840s a Georgia man had disguised himself as the Devil in order to rob a wealthy woman, but paid for it with his life,[6] and I have found several other cases. There was the 'demon' captured in Moscow in the 1800s who wore "horns, tail, fiery eyes and all" but turned out to be a rather creative thief.[7] There was the similarly dressed burglar in Maple Grove, Wisconsin, who was fatally shot in 1877 by the boy in the house he intended to rob.[8] And there was the thief dressed as the Devil who was again fatally shot by two boys in Huntsburg, Germany, in 1897.[9]

All of which explains nothing about some of the other sightings. Middletown, especially the Mount Hope area, was plagued by unusual occurrences the year before.[10] In 1868, Prince William county in Virginia suffered an outbreak of nightly visitations of what was described as "an immense figure… with large horns and terrible claws, which it contracts to a sort of hoof" that was estimated as "three times as large as a man". It was of a "pale bluish colour when first seen, but upon being irritated by the near approach of any person becomes a deadly white, and issues from its surface a small volume of smoke, accompanied by a sickening smell".[11] And in 1876 Douglas County, Missouri, was visited by "a real devil… a horrible monster – a creature beyond human ingenuity to describe; he was girdled about with chains, and his breath when exhaled, was a blaze of ignited brimstone; he was of immense size and seemed to travel with perfect ease and without noise, save the rattling of his chains."[12]

I have many more accounts of sightings of horned, fire-spitting demonic creatures on file, but cannot list them all here. It's unlikely that even a very enterprising guild of thieves would have wholeheartedly embraced this particular disguise. If not embellishment, yarn or hoax, some of these devil sightings may indeed have been cases of something very odd indeed.

NOTES

[1] I collected 34 reports, all with the same wording, in newspapers from various states.

[2] "Extraordinary Excitement in Bracken County, Kentucky", *Republican Compiler*, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 19 Mar 1866.

[3] "The Devil In Chicago", *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 23 Apr 1866; *Racine Journal*, Racine, Wisconsin, 25 Apr 1866.

[4] "The Devil Again", *Macon Telegraph*, Macon, Georgia, 14 May 1866; *Little Rock Daily Gazette*, Little Rock, Arkansas, 18 May 1866.

[5] "The Devil Caught And Caged", *Macon Daily Telegraph*, Macon, Georgia, 4 Apr 1866; *Georgia Weekly Telegraph*, Macon, Georgia, 9 Apr 1866.

[6] Mike Dash: "Spring-heeled Jack: To Victorian Bugaboo from Suburban Ghost", *Fortean Studies*, vol. 3, 1996, p117. Aside from Dash's source, I found the account in all instances headed "The Devil Killed", in: *Cleveland Daily Herald*, Cleveland, Ohio, 20 Nov 1841; *Indiana Journal*, Indianapolis, Indiana, 26 Nov 1841; *Pensacola Gazette*, Pensacola, Florida, 4 Dec 1841; *Wabash Courier*, Terre-Haute, Indiana, 4 Dec 1841.

[7] "Arresting A Ghost. A Spook That Set A Whole City Wild. Captured And Unmasked By A Brave Policeman", *Laredo Times*, Laredo, Texas, 27 Nov 1891.

[8] "Killed The Devil", *Galveston Daily News*, Galveston, Texas, 3 June 1877.

[9] All accounts headed "Killed The Devil", in: *Waterloo Daily Courier*, Waterloo, Iowa, 11 Mar 1897; *Atchison Daily Globe*, Atchison, Kansas, 4 Feb 1897; *Hornellsville Weekly Tribune*, Hornellsville, New York, 12 Feb 1897; *Edwardsville Intelligencer*, Edwardsville, Illinois, 19 Mar 1897; *Cambridge City Tribune*, Cambridge City, Indiana, 8 Apr 1897; *Daily Nevada State Journal*, Reno, Nevada, 18 Apr 1897.

[10] "Diabolism – Satan on the Rampage", *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Brooklyn, New York, 4 May 1866.

[11] "A Ghost – or Something – in Prince William County, Va.", *Petersburg Index*, Petersburg, Virginia, 18 Dec 1868.

[12] "Douglas County Devil", *The Phelps County New Era*, City of Rolla, Missouri, 1 July 1876.

True Giants

MARK A HALL and **LOREN COLEMAN** believe that giants once walked the Earth, before they were killed off by the hostility of their human neighbours. What's more, the fossil record tells us just what these oversized creatures were… and other evidence suggests that they might be hanging on even today in the world's remotest places…

Main illustration: **OWEN RICHARDSON**

We have all heard of giants. Today, the word is likely to bring to mind the few examples of human beings who have grown to extreme sizes, like Robert Wadlow, who reached a height of 8ft 11.1in (2.72m) and is regarded as "the tallest person in history". Typically, such human giants reach heights of less than 9ft (2.74m) and claims of greater heights appear to have been exaggerations.

There have been stories of much bigger giants, of course. The storybook giants were enormous creatures, taller than houses. But could there have been a basis in the natural world for such beings?

We believe that there were – and perhaps still are – 'True Giants' and that they are the factual basis from which the storybook giants emerged. They are the reason that people in ancient times spoke about famous giants like Goliath. And they are the reason that people still see tree-tall giants in modern times.

Not many people get to see them; the giants spend most of their time in remote places. But they still bump into people now and then, leaving behind them appropriately large footprints.

There is a basis in modern science for discussing the existence of genuine giants of this size; but you may be wondering why – outside of storybooks – you haven't heard much about them.

Well, firstly, the existence of True Giants is not a popular idea. Such things are not supposed to be real. So, when people have reported them in places like the Cairngorms of Scotland, in Southeast Asia, and in Canada, they have been regarded as mistaken or even dishonest.

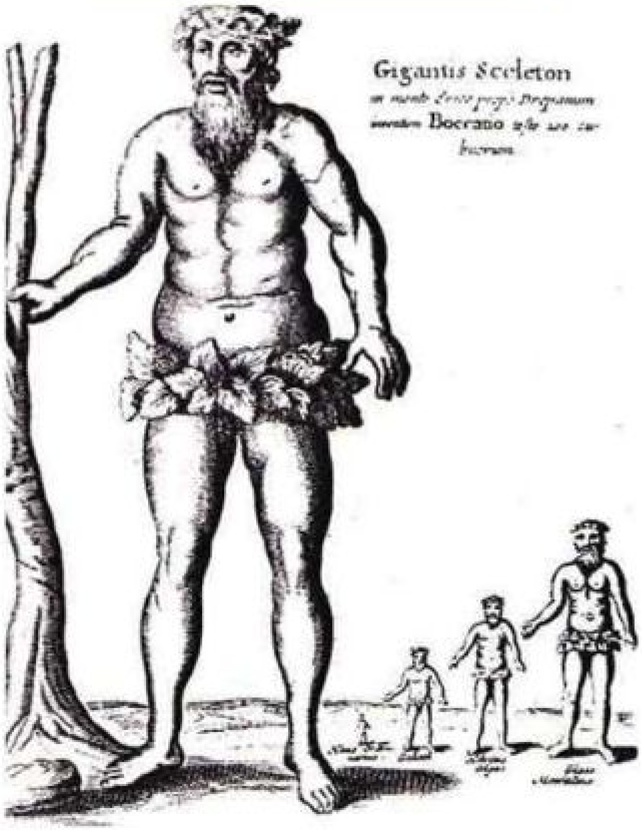
The storybook giants were enormous creatures, taller than human houses

Secondly, the fossils that have been found for this particular giant primate have been attributed not to a giant man but, erroneously, to a giant ape. There is no basis in the fossils themselves to support this determination. Rather, it has been merely a popular prejudice among the fossil specialists. Some people, though, have suggested that the fossils, known as *Gigantopithecus*, are gigantic men. We believe that view will one day be proven correct.

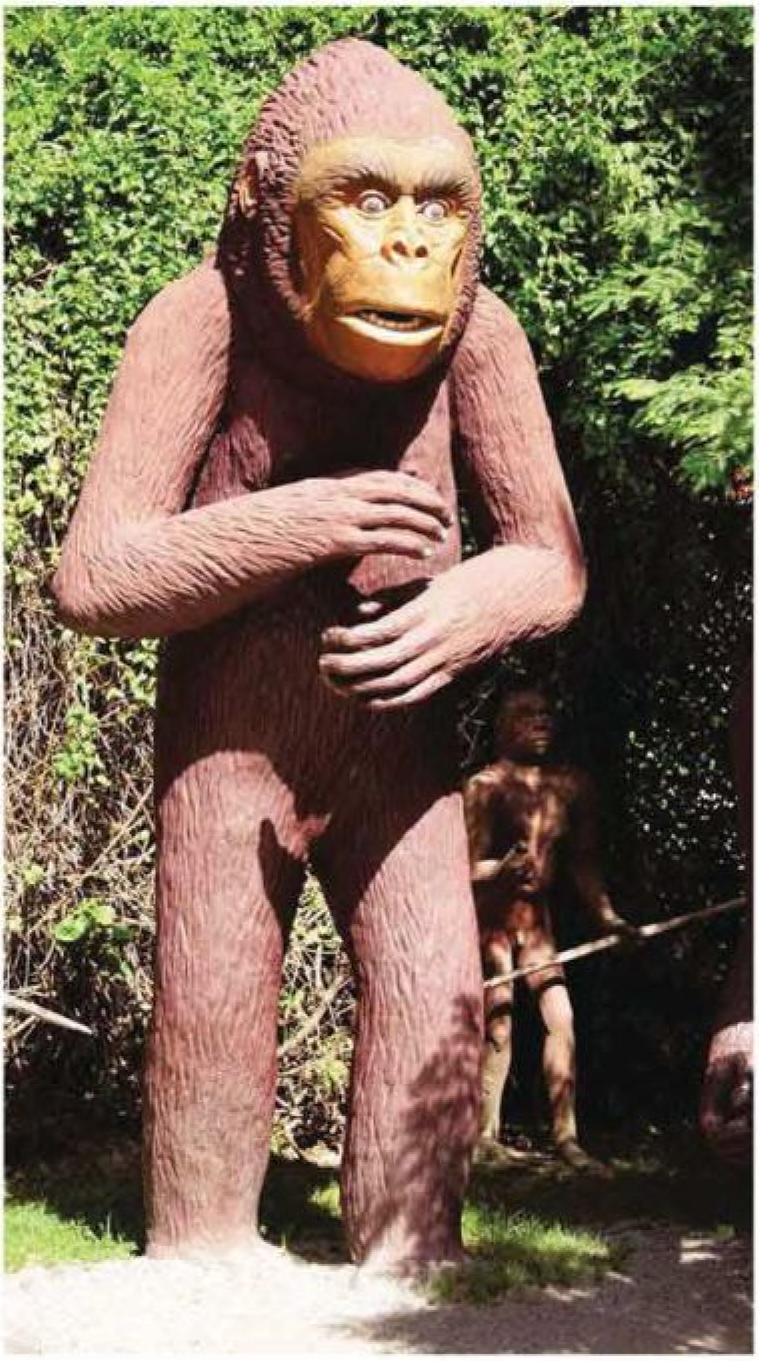
Gigantopithecus-sized bones have been found in many places around the globe in recent centuries, but were mostly lost before proper descriptions could be recorded. Some day, the finding of further gigantic bones in proper scientific digs will provide a full prehistoric record for True Giants.

We do know something of these giants today. They have been in the news in places like Southeast Asia for decades, and in late 2005 became a news sensation once again. The world was treated to news dispatches from the southern interior of the Malay Peninsula about the Orang Dalam (or "Interior Man") of Johor. Gigantic footprints were found and hairy, man-like figures, 10ft (3m) tall and more, were reportedly seen.

It was in 1992 that we first connected the specific characteristics of



LEFT: Ancient traditions speak of giants. Illustration from *Mundus Subterraneus*, 1678, by Athanasius Kircher, a German Jesuit.



LEFT: A lifesize statue based on *Gigantopithecus* fossils, in a model park in Bautzen-Kleinwelka, Sauriergarten, Germany.

True Giants in modern records with the survival of *Gigantopithecus*, and everything about extremely tall primates that has come to light since then has supported that association.

These True Giants are not "Bigfoot", despite some efforts to make simple comparisons with creatures like the one seen in the famous 1967 Patterson-Gimlin film. These are 'Neo-Giants', and they get no taller than 9ft high. They are of a different genus of primate, which doesn't grow to the heights of the True Giants. They are different in physical particulars and behaviour; and they leave different footprints.

The tree-tall True Giants were familiar under many names to the original inhabitants of North America. A petroglyph-covered boulder in North Carolina is named the Jutaculla Rock after the legendary giants of the mountains. Table Rock in South Carolina was associated with a chief among the giants. In eastern Canada, Samuel de Champlain heard about feared giants said to be living in the forests. Other French explorers heard the same and noted how the Indians appeared to be frightened by these creatures. In Alaska, True Giants were legendary. One historical record tells how an Indian chief disappeared right after his party saw signs of a True Giant they knew as Gilyuk.

Mountainous regions around the world seem to be populated with True Giant traditions. They suggest that even if these giants are no longer around, they were at one time a reality. Sightings of tall figures in mountain mists and thick forests, taken with the occasional record of enormous footprints, all point to the possible survival of True Giants even today.

THE UNIVERSAL GIANT

We are focusing on those many beings that are the survivors of *Gigantopithecus*, a specific genus of primate with its own lineage. When carefully examined, their physical description is like that of no other animal. They possess feet that leave enormous and unique impressions in the ground. They have their own cultural traits, perhaps achieved, in part, by borrowing from others; they have their own behaviour that is a consequence of their unique origins, size, and status among the primates.

All that we know of them now can be drawn from the human records of encounters in the wild, the tracks they have left behind, and the knowledge of ethnic groups around the planet who speak in their local histories about these "Big Men". The last fieldwork conducted by Bernard Heuvelmans, the "father of cryptozoology", conducted in the jungles of western Malaysia, was intended to verify all the accounts of these wild and hairy men of the region he had accumulated during an exchange of correspondence that had lasted two years. He felt there were gigantic anthropoids still unknown to zoology living in the area. He identified them as most probably *Gigantopithecus*, the greatest known primate, which lived around half million years ago in southern China and supposedly became extinct 100,000 years ago.

Legend tells of an Indian chief vanishing after seeing signs of a giant

Let's be clear from the outset that, despite the tendency of local ethnic groups to call these tall primates "men", they are most certainly not men (in the sense that they are not *Homo sapiens*). *Gigantopithecus*, while they may be perceived as "gigantic men" as opposed to "giant apes", are nevertheless not to be defined as "human". The true picture of primate evolution includes many branches with sophisticated capabilities. The recent discovery of *Homo floresiensis* in Indonesia is a good example of what we will be finding in the next decades. These Little People of Indonesia are at the other end of the spectrum of primate diversity. They are dwarfish "hobbits" that are now known to have co-existed with humans as recently as 12,000 years ago. The native people of Indonesia still speak of seeing them alive. The discovery of *H.floresiensis* is becoming a paradigm-busting experience for palæoanthropologists. They are finding this primate had unexpected capabilities, and may have survived into recent times.

When first writing about True Giants nearly 20 years ago, Mark Hall referred to them as "the universal giant". One of the surprising things to come to light about True Giants is just *how* universal they have turned out to be. They are known on small island groups like the Comoros in the Indian Ocean. They have been reported as rafting about the Pacific Ocean. The Eskimos of Greenland say they dwell on the edge of that island's great icecap. The waste areas of Iceland appear to have been inhabited by them in the past.

No one can say precisely where they might still be present today. But we can say – when traditions of such creatures exist even in the Hawaiian Islands – that they have spread around the globe. They have used rafts to travel and their antiquity means that they might well have moved from landmass to landmass long ago, using ancient land bridges and continental configurations. Their level of success might have varied over time depending upon the competition they encountered and the development of their own technological skills. More importantly, perhaps, they might have borrowed from others, such as human beings, who came along later in prehistory.

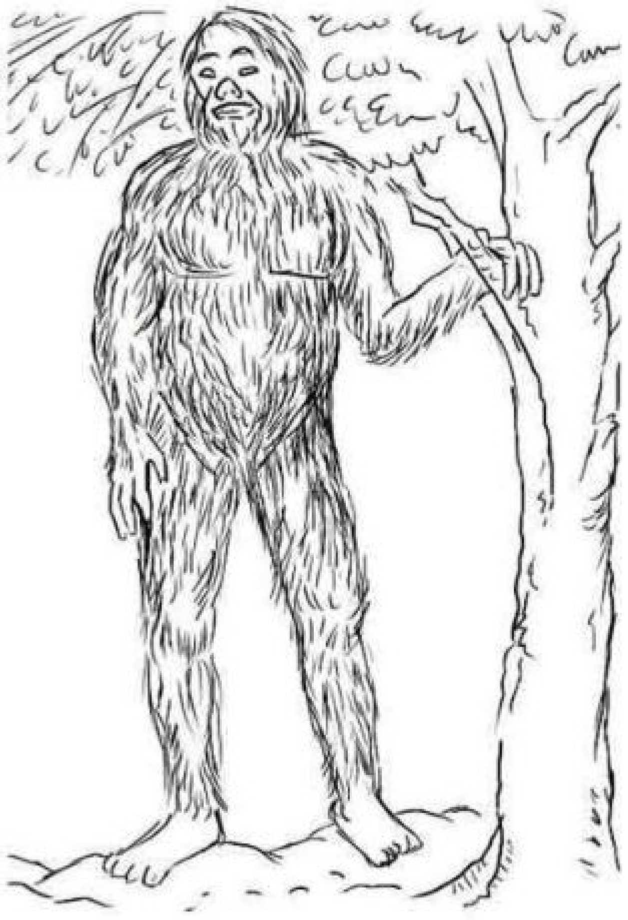
We have hints of what they were like,

handed down from older traditions among tribes of humans, but we also have specific knowledge of them in fossil finds. Those are limited at present to some areas of Asia. Other finds have suffered the fate of being lost and destroyed from lack of any interest or understanding of what they signified. If we can exercise more discretion when future bones of giants turn up in odd places, we will be able to study them and add to our knowledge about how these giants spread through the last several million years to end up where we see them today.

True Giants appear to be present still in many places on the planet. They have been seen in places not so far from where many people are living, quite unaware of them. How do we explain this lack of awareness?

Firstly, the giants have learned to be secretive, for their history is one of being killed ever since humans began to use firearms and other weapons to defend themselves against competitors.

Secondly, this topic has been an unwelcome one in modern times. Our social memory of these creatures has faded rapidly and has been manipulated, psychologically, as well as sociologically. In *Giants in Those Days*, classics professor Walter Stephens of John Hopkins University argued that the modern view of jovial giants has obscured earlier records that presumed the historical reality of giants and the perception of them as aggressive co-inhabitants of Earth.[1]



LEFT: Peter Loh's sketch from a drawing by a native eyewitness of the Orang Dalam, who saw it late in 2005.

FOSSIL EVIDENCE

Four categories of evidence support the presence of giants as living beings around the world, beings which have survived into the modern day, despite their limitations in intellect and the enmity of humankind.

The many giant traditions are one body of evidence to consider. Another is the consistent accounts given by people who have seen giants and given us descriptions of what they observed. A third category of evidence can be found in the tracks left by giants in places where they have been reported.

And, finally, there are fossil remains that show the origin of True Giants. The first description of these fossils attributed them to *Gigantopithecus*, meaning "Giant Ape." A later opinion suggested they belonged to *Gigantanthropus*, or "Giant Man". We think the latter designation will one day be proven to be the more accurate one.

Between 16 and 10 million years ago, a group of primates, the Eurasian Drypopithecines, had evolved. Among them was a man-sized, ape-like creature designated *Dryopithecus*. It appears to have survived to give rise to the Yeti legend of the Himalayas. It had a much larger relative, known as *Gigantopithecus*, known only from jawbones and teeth.[2] Remains of other parts of the body have not, so far as records tell us, survived.

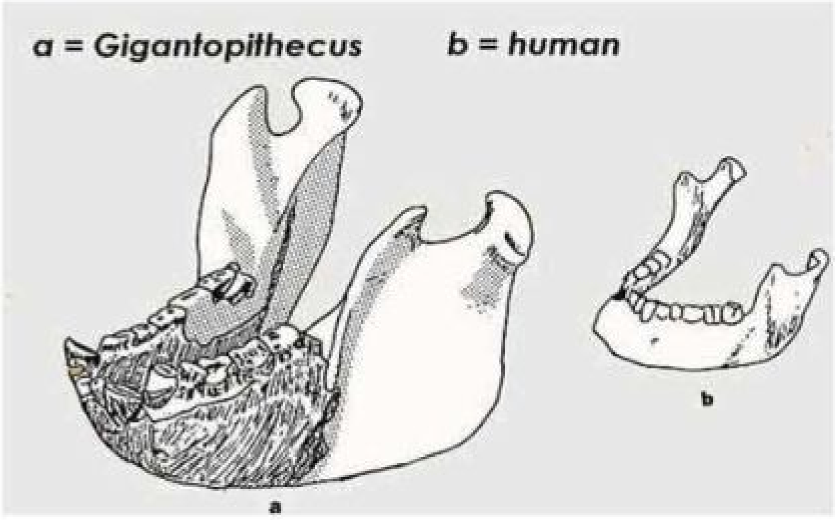
The fossils are rare. They have been identified in China, India, and Vietnam. The first bones of *Gigantopithecus* to be recognised were obtained by Gustav Heinrich Ralph von Koenigswald (1902–1982), a German scientist who cultivated the habit of examining the contents of apothecary shops in Java and China. In this way, he was able to spot fossilised bones that had been collected and turned over to druggists, who would grind up these "dragon bones" to create potions. Based only upon his earliest finds of giant teeth, Von Koenigswald suggested that they came from a large ape.[3]

Von Koenigswald's colleague Franz Weidenreich (1873–1948) re-examined the giant teeth and subsequent finds, arriving at a different conclusion. He thought they were evidence of a giant man and should be called *Gigantanthropus*.[4] The earlier view has prevailed among most scientists to the present day, so the name used in all discussions has remained *Gigantopithecus*.

The best way to appreciate the tremendous size of these creatures might be to compare the fossil jawbone with a modern human jawbone. Reconstructions of this animal have depicted it as an oversized gorilla. One model depicted an upright *Gigantopithecus* as reaching a height of 10ft (3m), although we think that is too short.[5] This creature walked upright most of the time and was unlike a gorilla in most respects. We think it reached the heights attributed to the True Giants, exceeding 10ft. A dead True Giant was once measured to be 13ft (4m) tall; heights of 15 and 20ft (4.6 and 6m) have been reported after more recent sightings.

What makes these soaring attributes seem plausible is that the reported sizes of footprints have also increased accordingly. As reports have told of bigger giants, so have the measurements of the footprints grown.

We would allow that once we get to heights of 20ft we might have reached



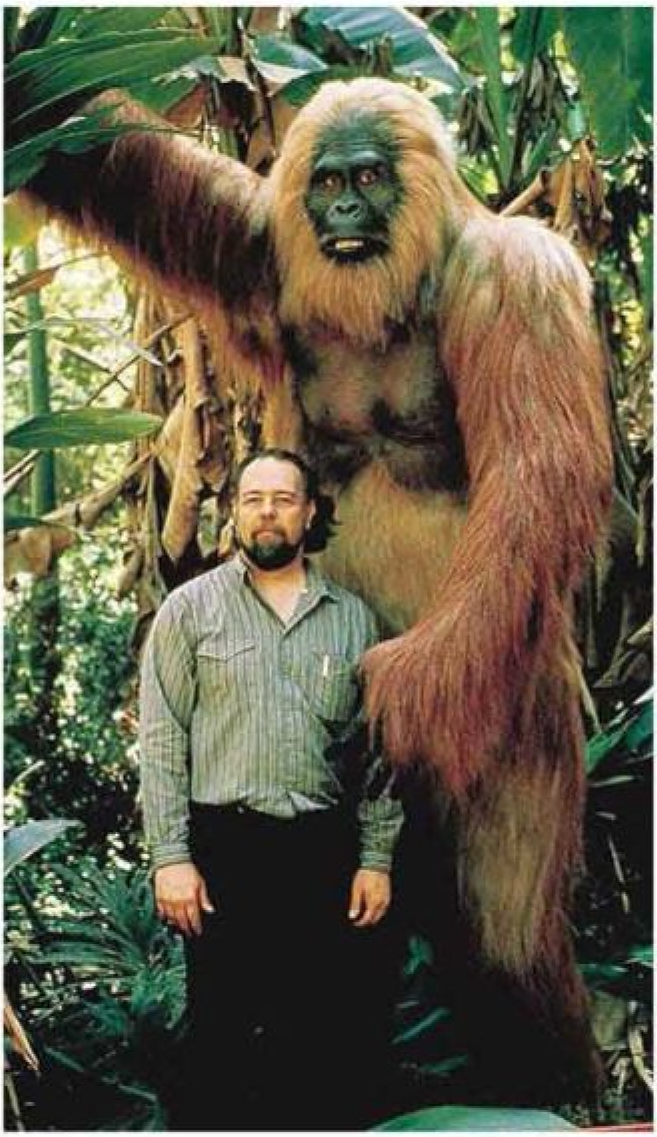
COURTESY LEHIGH VALLEY MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

ABOVE LEFT: Comparison of jawbones from *Gigantopithecus* fossils and *Homo sapiens*. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Replica of *Gigantopithecus* fossil mandible.

a size so great that humans would have difficulty making an accurate estimate; also, unintended exaggeration might enter the picture and account for these more spectacular reports. However, we wouldn't want to preclude the possibility of these giants reaching even greater heights. Perhaps there are cases of long-lived True Giants who have exceeded the more common heights of 10 to 20ft among their kind.

People have reported True Giants in North America. This raises objections that no fossil remains have been found in the Americas, and that a possible migration into the New World is unlikely. However, there *are* accounts of gigantic bones having been found in the New World – they were simply poorly handled and lost. Scientists weren't looking for such evidence and took no interest in the finds when they had a chance to examine them. The history of palæoanthropology in North America has been one of looking for fossil finds within limited parameters of time and species. To stray from those parameters was not "acceptable", and thus reports of "giant bones" were often excluded from consideration. With an increased vigilance, we can hope that fossil remains will one day be recognised and preserved.

As for the migration issue, there have been major geological changes on the planet such as those in the Pleistocene now recognised. True Giants could have walked from the Old World to the New when a land bridge permitted it. Or they might have rafted their way, as one Latin American tradition has described. As human beings made the journey from the Old World to the New, these other primates probably did the same, and we can speculate that they might have done so even before humans made the move.



LEFT: William Munns with his model of *Gigantopithecus blacki*.

BELOW: Footprints found in Acorn County, Mississippi, on 14 March 1976, along Smith Bridge Road north of US72.

LEE ANN TAYLOR

BIG FOOTPRINTS

Observations of True Giants in modern times have not been frequent, but we can't really be sure how often they might have been sighted. If, in your headlights one night, you saw a 20ft (6m)-high figure cross the road in front of you, how many people would *you* tell?

There is plenty of American Indian lore concerning True Giants; they have left their mark in the names given to places in North America. And there are modern reports for them as well, from all over the world. To survive at all, they remain shy of human beings. It is no accident that the detailed observations of these giants are so often made from a distance and that the best records generally come from mountainous areas, just as they do in North America. There are two reasons for this.

Firstly, these surviving giants no longer confront human beings if it can be avoided. In rare instances of prolonged visual contact, they have kept their distance from observers. Secondly, in the New World's Pacific Northwest there has been an unparalleled effort to collect accounts of hairy beings of all kinds. If comparable efforts were made elsewhere, we would be likely to hear of similar matter-of-fact and detailed sightings of True Giants.

Before unwarranted assumptions about the body and the mass of True Giants are made, the many unknowns should be stressed. We don't know how much of the impressive size of True Giants is only the hairy exterior and what the body beneath the hair is like. We don't know how efficient this body is, how graceful or awkward it is, what ills it is prone to, and how active or inactive it must be in any one day. The unanswered questions about True Giants are legion, such as the extent of their culture, their speech and language, if any, and even the specifics of their diet. (Their folkloric reputation as "cannibals" should not cloud our perceptions of their diet. To support their size, the giants are probably omnivorous, eating both plants and animals.)

The teeth of *Gigantopithecus* are considered to have been adapted to graminivorous feeding, such as grinding roots and grass stems.[6] The suggestion here is that they also added meat to their diet, if not at an early date, then certainly in recent centuries.

The modern appearances of True Giants are distinguished most often by the unique tracks they leave. Those tracks are enormous and show only four prominent toes. There is sometimes the trace of a fifth toe on the inside of the foot. These giants almost certainly have mammalian limbs, so the bones for five digits are accounted for in some way in the course of their evolution.

The feet of True Giants support a great height and it may be that the hallux (normally a big toe) provides added assistance in balancing their upright stance; it appears to be a smaller toe than the rest and to serve in some auxiliary capacity.

People convinced that they know what "genuine Bigfoot tracks" look like have dismissed such prints. Large, five-toed tracks also exist that can be attributed to creatures known as Neo-Giants, which grow no taller than 9ft in height. True Giants are something different and their tracks typically show only four prominent toes.

An old saying has it that the map is not the same thing as the land it shows. We should also bear in mind that "the track is not the foot". An impression left in a medium of sand, soil or snow does not show us the structure of the foot; it is merely a disturbance made by the motion of the foot. Impressions can be incomplete, as when running or walking on tiptoes. Four-toed tracks are another case altogether. The impression shows us the result of the evolution of the primate foot to carry a creature the size of the True Giants. The foot is flat and broad, and sometimes has only four apparent toes of similar size. Its width is one-half of the total length of the foot. The fifth toe has become vestigial, or might even be absent in some tracks.

The same tendency toward a broad foot with fewer digits is apparent in the Yeti track. The Yeti is a squat and bulky creature that can be associated with Dryopithecine origins. It has a broad track that has nearly evolved to the point of appearing to have only three toes. This is because three of the toes have become so small and bunched that they appear to be almost one toe. There was early confusion about the number of toes on this type of track when it was first described in Asia.

The best records of True Giant tracks

have been preserved in North America. Examples have been reported at Cold Lake, Alberta (10x21in / 25x53cm), in June 1976; Snoqualmie, Washington (8x17in / 20x43cm), in January 1976; and outside Astoria, Oregon (7½ x 17in / 18x43cm), in December 1977. A graph of the widths and the lengths of these tracks show a consistent average slope line running from a point of 3½ x 9in (8.9x23cm) to the point of 12x24in (30x61cm).

There has been no direct evidence to link *Gigantopithecus* with the four-toed tracks and the True Giants of folklore. The large imprints with four big toes and one toe on the side have been found and associated with the Orang Dalam, which looks like a living embodiment of *Gigantopithecus*.

DO GIANTS WALK THE EARTH?

If we have more contemporary evidence of True Giants from North America than elsewhere, that's because more effort has been made to gather the records of encounters there. But now that record could be eclipsed by close studies of giants in Southeast Asia. The surviving descendants of *Gigantopithecus* have been identified in Europe, Asia, and North America as upright and lean near-men of spectacular height. Those who wish to see proof of the existence of giants need only examine the jawbones and teeth of this fossil type. Many other alleged bones and skulls of giants could be mentioned, but they were found centuries before the advent of the physical anthropologist and were not preserved.

Giants have been interpreted as personifications of natural phenomena, as older gods in conflict with newer ones, and as demons from a realm of the dead. Regarding another view of giants, that they were some kind of giant man, mythologist John A MacCulloch has this to say: "They have been regarded as an earlier and wilder race of men, with stone weapons, opposed to the more cultured race which uses the plough… The wilder traits of giants suggest a savage race, but the theory does not explain the universal belief in giants nor the great stature ascribed to them." [7]

The stature of giants is explained by their identity as a different genus of primate (i.e., *Gigantopithecus*). The "universal" nature of giants could be explained by the following hypothesis: that the distribution of "giant men" is nearly coincident with the dispersal of human beings around the globe, and the success of True Giants was based on their skill in mimicking the cultures of human beings. In clothing, language, and subsistence patterns they may have done well by copying the models they observed in neighbouring humans.

The brains of these giants combined with their physical skills gave them the capacity to live like human beings, communicate with humans, and adapt to the world's varied climates, from the frigid north to the equatorial regions. The giants were successful in ways that human beings demonstrated first. What we know about True Giants suggests to us three phases of their interaction with human beings. The first phase tells us of ancient times when giants lived like humans and shared the language and culture of the smaller and weaker men and women. The giants' abilities allowed them to spread across the globe, just like their smaller relatives. The extent of giant penetration into Africa and South America is still problematic, although this situation may only reflect our collective inattention to the subject in those regions.

The next phase is that of a schism between the species. True Giants may have been *too* successful at the art of mimicry. With their superior size, they would have been perceived, after all, as somewhat menacing. They had great appetites and were competing with humans for the same food and living space. They were notorious for resorting to cannibalism. This particular "cannibalism" always involved the eating of humans as opposed to eating other giants. Many humans regarded them as ugly and stupid. Perhaps the giants' numbers increased to a point that alarmed and threatened their smaller neighbours.

A second cause comes to mind for such a schism in this phase. True Giants may have lacked the capacity to advance culturally along with human beings. In ancient times, the lives of our ancestors were harsh and crude in comparison to our modern existence. But while our ancestors shared a harsh and primitive world with True Giants, cultural change may have exaggerated the primitive and unattractive traits of the giants as viewed by humans. The advances made by humans would have increased the differences between the two groups. The consequence of this 'falling out' in phase two was the deaths of many giants at the hands of human giant-killers.

The third phase of relations is the removal of True Giants to a reclusive life in remote locations. Today's giants may be regarded as primitive in contrast to their own ancestors. They might be said to have degenerated, because the cultural borrowing they once relied on is now denied them. However, they might, arguably, be smarter than their ancestors, because they have learned to avoid confronting human beings.

The giants we believe are surviving today are all remote dwellers in mountains and other areas unfrequented by humans.

It is possible – even likely – that the three phases described above were acted out all over the globe. Our knowledge of the European experience – familiarity, conflict, and finally estrangement between humans and giants – may simply reflect the better record-keeping and the accessibility of these records in European languages. Civilisations that rose and fell in many parts of the world may have had similar interactions with the giants.

Today, the last phase is universal. Giants survive as remote occupants of the least hospitable terrain on the major continents. Holding out against extinction, they are perhaps the fittest of their species and not necessarily the 'stupid' creatures defeated by our ancestors.

It is time to venture behind the "ridicule curtain" that has protected True Giants from scrutiny in modern times and try to learn more about these creatures still reported to roam the world's remote woods and mountains.

Edited and adapted from the book *True Giants: Is Gigantopithecus Still Alive?* by Mark A Hall and Loren Coleman, published by Anomalist Books (www.anomalistbooks.com).

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

MARK A HALL and **LOREN COLEMAN** have both been active researchers and authors in cryptozoology and other fortean fields for decades now. They were first introduced by Ivan T Sanderson in 1969 and have remained friends and colleagues ever since. Hall's books include *Thunderbirds: America's Living Legends of Giant Birds* and Coleman's books include *Mysterious America*, *Curious Encounters*, and *Field Guide To Bigfoot, Yeti and Other Mystery Primates Worldwide*.

TRUE GIANTS
Is Gigantopithecus Still Alive?
Mark A. Hall and Loren Coleman

NOTES

[1] He writes: "A relatively quick experiment in the cultural history of the Giant can be made by observing the evolution since 1878 of the entry 'Giant' in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Even well-read people of today may be perplexed to see the foremost general encyclopædia indulging in discussions of 'the conception of giants as special races distinct from mankind'… The same information may be found as late as 1911, except that the *Britannica* then included information on a pioneering study published in 1904 by two French researchers, who had demonstrated the scientific impossibility that Giants ever existed. In fact, Pierre-Emile Launois and Pierre Roy's *Etudes biologiques sur les géants* can be said to have accomplished the scientific demythification of the Giant."

[2] Franz Weidenreich: *Apes, Giants and Man*, University of Chicago Press, 1946, pp57–61; Michael Day: *Guide to Fossil Man*, 1st ed., World, New York, 1965, pp262–7; Elwyn Simons & Peter Ettel: "Gigantopithecus", *Scientific American* 222(I), pp76–85; and Robert Eckhardt: "Population Genetics and Human Origins", *Scientific American* 226 (1), pp94–103. Summary treatments of *Gigantopithecus* appear in such books as David Pilbeam: *The Ascent of Man*, Macmillan, New York, 1972, pp86–89 and Frank E Poirier: *Fossil Man: An Evolutionary Journey*, Mosby, St. Louis, 1973, pp46–48.

[3] GH Ralph von Koenigswald: *Meeting Prehistoric Man*, Harper, New York, 1956, p59.

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[5] Russell L Ciochon: "The Ape That Was", *Natural History* 160, 11/91, pp54–63.

[6] Simons & Ettel, *op.cit.*, pp81–82.

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Starlite Man

MERRILY HARPUR wonders what happened to Maurice Ward – a real-life 'Man in the White Suit' – and his invention, Starlite, a mysterious substance that promised to change the world.

PHOTOGRAPHS: TELEGRAPH / CHRIS BROOKS

The memory remains vivid: the occasion in 1990 when I heard Melvyn Bragg witnessing a miracle on Radio 4, wonder suffusing his adenoidal consonants like an inhalation of Vicks VapoRub.

It was a miracle that was subsequently demonstrated many times over, and has been subject to rigorous scientific testing at the highest levels – at NASA for instance – yet its mechanism remains completely mysterious.

Melvyn's guest on the radio show had been Maurice Ward, the inventor of a substance his young granddaughter had named for him: Starlite. Melvyn had seen him painting a sheet of metal with a thin layer of Starlite paste, whereupon the BBC fireman had turned a welders' blowtorch on it for three minutes or so. Afterwards, Melvyn was invited to touch the metal sheet… it was barely warm.

The story as it broke in the popular press was that Maurice Ward, a hairdresser and amateur inventor from Yorkshire, had stumbled upon the extraordinary insulating properties of this cheaply produced plastic polymer while he was trying to create an improved hair spray. He was naturally disinclined to reveal the formula, or give away samples for testing elsewhere, but was waiting for a worthwhile offer from a government or conglomerate to manufacture the substance.

The implications of Starlite were breathtaking: no more heavy ceramic tiles would be necessary to insulate the space shuttles; no aeroplane engine would ever burst into flames again; firemen would be able to walk like Daniel through the fiery furnace; no more nuclear meltdowns; in fact, nothing need ever go up in flames again. It was the complete containment of fire – perhaps as significant a step forward in the history of mankind as its first use.

I waited confidently for our lives to change, and when after a few years nothing had happened, I smelt a fortean rat, and opened a file on Starlite and Maurice Ward. This is the story so far…

THE BREAKTHROUGH

While Maurice Ward had no academic credentials, he was not exactly an amateur. He had started tinkering with the properties of plastics while working as a hairdresser, and with his wife Eileen and four daughters ran a small plastics workshop making highly successful own-brand hair products and dyes. On 22 August 1985, there came an event which, for Ward, was life-changing. A British Airtours plane on the way to Corfu failed to take off at Manchester Airport and caught fire. He is quoted as saying: "It was an air disaster on the ground… it was the smoke and toxicity that killed people, not the fire. Fifty-five people died in 40 seconds. We thought we'd like to find something that doesn't burn very much, that would be useful."

With a new, altruistic focus to his experiments, he began mixing up variations of what he called 'gubbins' in a food mixer – up to 20 different formulations a day. Eventually, he got one he liked, extruded the substance into sheet form and tested it with a blowtorch. "I just thought, well, it's better than we ever expected. It's better than it needs to be." He found he could coat his hand with the stuff and turn a blowtorch on it to 2,500°C (4,530°F) without feeling any heat. It was a veritable Philosopher's Stone of a substance.

Delighted at his success, Maurice hastened to the chemical companies with his invention, certain that they would kill for the opportunity to go into partnership with him. But instead they laughed at his outrageous claims, sending him the standard brush-off letters they routinely send to cranks and nutters. Many have noted the

ABOVE LEFT: A bunsen burner blasts away, but the Starlite-protected materials are little more than charred.
ABOVE RIGHT: A block of Starlite shows a stain produced by a nuclear blast.

similarity of Maurice's story to that of the classic 1951 film *The Man in the White Suit* in which a northern factory worker played by Alec Guinness invents a material which repels dirt, but no one takes him seriously (when he is believed, the establishment tries its best to suppress his miracle fabric for fear of its effect on existing industries and vested interests).

Undeterred, Maurice continued to solicit interest from big business, but the breakthrough came on television's *Tomorrow's World* in 1993, where the presenter subjected a raw egg, painted with a thin layer of Starlite, to five minutes under a blowtorch. Not only could he touch the egg at the end of this onslaught, he could break it into a bowl, still raw.

The defence establishment was apparently watching the programme, because they contacted Maurice and began their own tests – with the astounding results that were published in *Jane's International Defence Weekly* as a scoop (but not an April Fool) by Pamela Pohling-Brown on 1 April 1993.

Ms Pohling-Brown had interviewed Ward and learned that Starlite consisted of "a variety of (organic) polymers and co-polymers with both organic and inorganic additives, including borates and small quantities of ceramics and other special barrier ingredients – up to 21 in all." She summarised its wonders thus: "Perhaps uniquely for a thermal and blast-proof material, it is not wholly inorganic but up to 90 per cent organic. It chars slowly and emits virtually no toxic fumes under the application of heat. It is, above all, an intelligent material, able to tailor its response to the individual stimulus applied. It thus boasts a complex palette of properties and capabilities, some of which are not yet completely understood. Damage protection is due to several simultaneous effects, including reflective scatter and absorption."

Nor was this the end of its capabilities. At the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Foulness, Starlite withstood simulated nuclear flashes generating temperatures of around 10,000°C (18,000°F), hotter than the surface of the Sun. Most materials vaporise beyond 2,000°C (3,630°F). Pure carbon, which has the highest melting point of all elements, melts at 3,500°C (6,330°F).

Starlite withstood simulated nuclear flashes hotter than the Sun's surface

Starlite then travelled to America, where tests at the White Sands missile range in New Mexico, under NATO auspices, subjected it to a massive simulated nuclear explosion. The material withstood it, charred but unbowed.

Back in England again, at the Royal Signals and Radar Establishment (RSRE) at Malvern, it was now subjected to pulses from visual-wavelength lasers, which would have burned holes through classic polymer material almost immediately. Starlite showed little damage to the surface, merely small pits with the approximate diameter of the beam and with little evidence of melting. During the tests, a plasma of ionised gas was seen to form on its surface which seemed to counter the incoming laser beams. Prof. Keith Lewis, who led the RSRE tests, told Maurice that Starlite had "unique properties" and that the process was very complex – "millions of things are happening all at once."

Pohling-Brown's article was picked up by the press agencies, and news of Starlite travelled around the world. All of a sudden, the chemical multinationals, which had been so dismissive, were falling over themselves to get a slice of the action. "Yes, they used to laugh at me in the beginning," said Ward, "but they are taking me seriously now all right." In a revealing footnote to this aspect of the Starlite saga, the iconoclastic science journalist Richard Milton wrote:

"One other interesting consequence is that the large corporations who had rejected his initial approaches in such a knee-jerk fashion, conducted internal inquests to find out what had gone wrong, both with their own research and with their dealings with the outside world… ICI's own paints laboratory held an internal audit… [which] showed that the most scientifically qualified of its research chemists had contributed to the least number of patents, and the fewer scientific qualifications the staff possessed, the greater the number of patents they had contributed to. In the most striking case of all, the person who had contributed most to ICI's patents had no scientific qualifications at all."

Milton concluded: "It seems that Maurice Ward's greatest strength as a researcher was that he had not been taught how to think…"

THE FATE OF STARLITE

It was at this point – just when the world and I expected news of a deal which would make Ward a hugely rich man and the world a safer, and perhaps completely different, place – that the story of Starlite went dark.

Or at least the narrative seemed to pass from the product to its mercurial inventor, described by Pohling-Brown as "a true British eccentric", refusing even to patent his invention because he would then have to reveal its formula. According to her, "He subsequently formed relationships with various defence companies, including Hunting, but was afraid that he would be fobbed off with a relatively meagre lump sum while any company he dealt with would profit much more and take the credit. And so some at least seemed to want to do. So afraid of this was he that it was said that his daughter accompanied him to tests and meetings with a hoover in case small pieces should become detached. I cannot testify to the truth of this…" He certainly entered into talks with

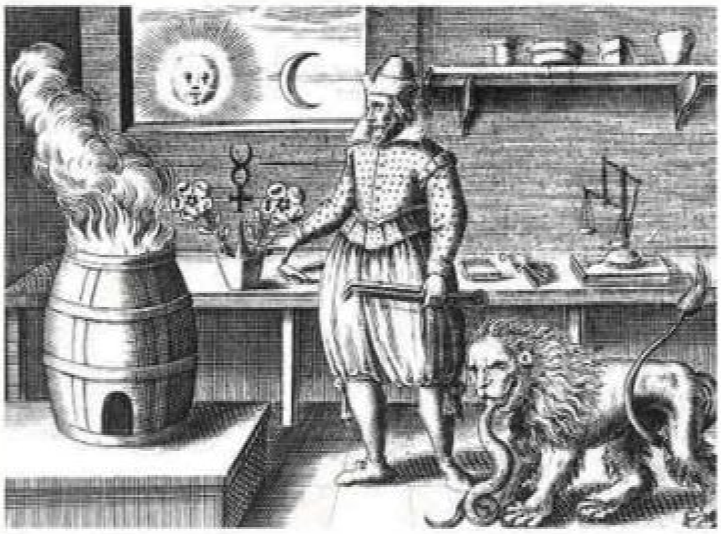
STARLITE AND THE STONE

PATRICK HARPUR finds parallels between Maurice Ward and earlier alchemists seeking the legendary Philosopher's Stone.

"I am an eyewitness thereof, and if I had not seen it, I should not have believed it," wrote Edward Dyer to John Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1588. "I saw Master Kelley put of the base metal into the crucible, and after it was set a little upon the fire, and a very small quantity of the medicine put in, and stirred with a stick of wood, it came forth in great proportion perfect gold, to the touch, to the hammer, to the test."

Dyer was as surprised as Melvyn Bragg watching the effects of Starlite (p40). He was in Prague, the centre of European alchemy under Rudolf II; and Kelley was performing one of several recorded transmutations of base metal into gold via his 'medicine'. Also referred to as an oil, tincture, or powder, it was mostly called the Philosopher's Stone. Edward Kelley was John Dee's scryer (or medium) and, to his credit, he never claimed to have manufactured the Stone; he said that he had found it, as the result of a vision, hidden in the ruined walls of Glastonbury Abbey.

It is a thing I was forcibly reminded of when I read about Starlite. Both Stone and Starlite are the stuff of legend or folktale, like the fabled car which was said to run on distilled water (and whose design was supposed to have been brutally suppressed by oil companies). Yet both are more disconcertingly tangible. They are at once miraculous, practically impossible, yet they seem to have passed over into the empirical world. They seem too good to be true, yet seem to be true; we can't get our hands on them. They hover on the boundary between fact and fiction, like the Holy Grail. Like Starlite, the secret of the Philosopher's Stone was closely guarded. Like Mr Ward, the alchemists could not be prevailed upon to disclose it. It was a secret which bedevilled and enchanted the European imagination for 500 years. It was a stone, yes, but as they never tired of reiterating, a "Stone that is no stone". It not only turned base metal to gold, but, as the elixir of life, the panacea or cure-all, it conferred immortality. It perfected humans, as it were, just as it perfected metals, which in the mediæval view were all striving towards the incorruptible condition of gold. Starlite has similarly mythic resonances: to wear a coat of it would make us as invulnerable to harm as Achilles or, more aptly, as Daniel, who stood unscathed in the fiery furnace.



GETTY IMAGES / HULTON ARCHIVE

In 1666, the scientist Helvetius, who had publicly poured scorn on alchemy and its alleged results, was visited at his home in the Hague by a stranger who showed him "three ponderous pieces or small lumps of the Stone, each about the bigness of a small walnut, transparent, of a pale brimstone colour". Though sceptical, Helvetius persuaded the stranger to part with a piece of this substance. But when he objected to its smallness, the stranger took it back and halved it with his fingernail, saying that this would still be enough (a sort of fairy-tale motif, this). He then promised to return and show Helvetius how to 'project' the Stone – that is, how to perform a transmutation. But he never did return. Whereupon, at the urging of his wife, the scientist had a go himself, describing the procedure with all the immediacy of *Tomorrow's World*:

"I cut half an ounce… of old lead, and put it into a crucible in the fire, which being melted, my wife put in the said medicine made up into a small pill or button, which presently made such a hissing and bubbling in its perfect operation, that within a quarter of an hour all the mass of lead was totally transmuted into the best and finest gold, which made as all amazed as planet-struck…" (The gold was pronounced by the local goldsmith to be the finest he had ever assayed).

Perhaps the manufacture of the stone depended on serendipity as much as science

As CG Jung has shown, the Great Work of the alchemists was not only chemical and metallurgical, but a process of self-transformation. Their various pieces of glass laboratory equipment, collectively known as the 'Hermetic Egg', were a sort of liminal zone in which substance and psyche, the literal and the metaphorical, interpenetrated via the 'secret fire' of the imagination to forge, after years of effort, who knows what impossibility? In some sense, the alchemist and his Work were fused, producing a third thing between them, a thing neither wholly objective nor wholly subjective, neither wholly mind nor matter. So it is no wonder that the alchemist found it hard, like Mr Ward, to part with the secret. It would be like handing over some essential part of himself, as painful as losing a leg. Perhaps, too, the manufacture of the Stone depended as much on serendipity as science, so that the results might not be amenable to replication, as science demands. Maybe these are two reasons for Mr Ward's reluctance to part with his secret – it isn't the money, since he could command more than he would ever need. He may even be wise to behave as he does. I wouldn't want him to turn out like James Price, a brilliant young scientist who, unlike Maurice, bowed to the will of the powers that be – and suffered the consequences.

Price was elected to the Royal Society in 1781 at the tender age of 29. After several years of alchemical experiments carried out at home on his modest estate near Guildford, he published his results in a pamphlet. It is hopelessly 'unscientific'. For example, he upholds the mediæval belief that metals such as mercury, silver and gold are variant forms of the same basic substance and therefore able to be changed into one another. He claims to have made a "white powder" capable of transforming mercury or silver to gold; but nowhere does he give details of how he did this. He goes on to say that he subsequently made four or five grains of a red powder and about three times as much of the white. He performed seven "experiments" in front of some 20 witnesses. The last experiment was attended by two lords, two knights, three clergymen, a doctor and four Fellows of the Royal Society. And he confidently turned mercury into silver and gold with the white and red powders respectively.

All his equipment was supplied by his witnesses, and every stage of the experiment – including the projection of the powders – was performed by them to rule out any trickery. The results caused a sensation; but his fellow scientists remained, of course, sceptical. The Royal Society demanded that he divulge the composition of his powders, which he both refused to do and refused to say why he wouldn't. They then demanded that he at least repeat the experiments – to which he replied that he couldn't because his powders were now all used up and, besides, it would entail too much time and danger to his health to make more. However, under intense pressure, he eventually promised that he would try. About a year later, he invited the Society to witness a repetition of his experiments. Only three members turned up. While they were examining his equipment, Price collapsed. He was found to have poisoned himself with prussic acid. All agreed that he had either been a fraud or a lunatic.

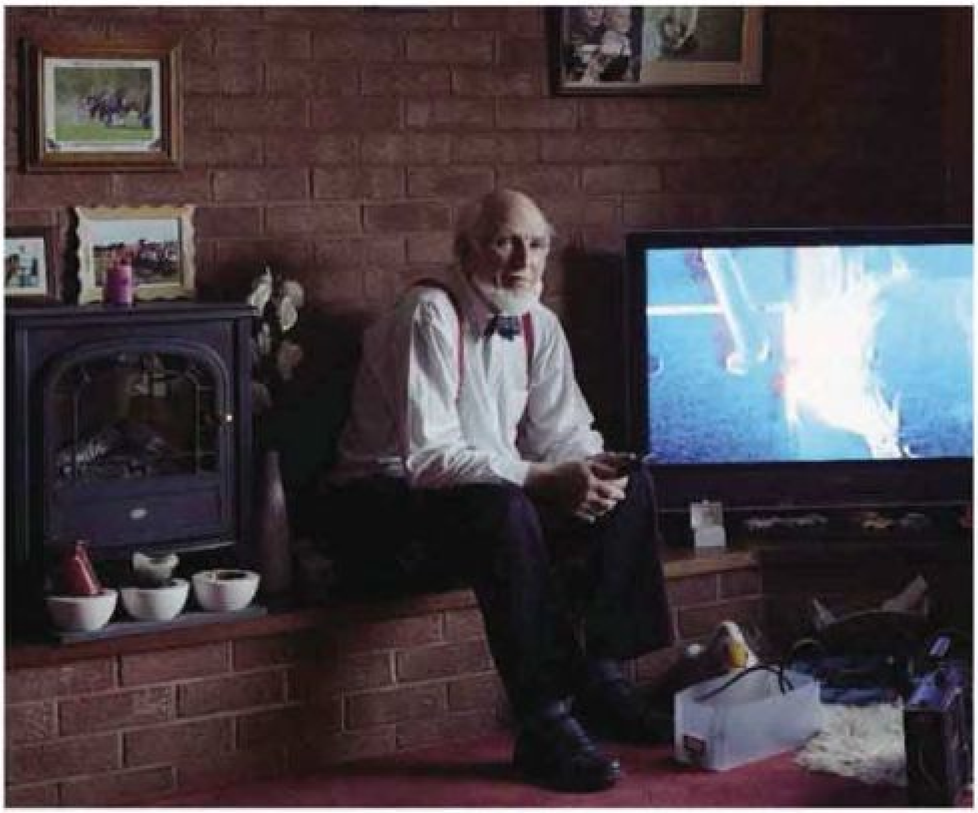
Boeing in the late Nineties, but again negotiations collapsed, each side blaming the other. Toby Greenbury, a partner at law firm Mischon de Reya and Ward's lawyer for 20 years, has described him as a one-man band. "He's an inventor, and he has an unusual way of looking at things. It has proved to be very difficult to deal with large companies. There hasn't been a meeting of minds."

Ward required, not unreasonably, 51 per cent of the holding in the joint projects suggested by NASA, BAE, Boeing, and many industrial giants. However, the main sticking point seems always to have been the ownership of the Starlite formula. Ward says: "They always wanted a licence, and if they wanted that they had to sign an agreement that says they won't plagiarise or reverse-engineer. If they don't sign that, they get a sample and then they reverse-engineer and why would they bother to get a licence?" This does sound like extraordinary pigheadedness on the part of industry and governments. Would it be the end of the world just to give him what he wants? (Maybe it will be the end of the world if they do not?) Ward also claims that there have been attempts to steal Starlite, including break-ins at his office; which is why he keeps the Starlite formula in a safer place – in his head.

So instead of the Starlite factory we hoped for, it was the rumour machine that went into production. Conspiracy theorists speculated that Starlite had been classified by the defence industry, and that Ward has somehow been silenced. Ward himself apparently feared military use of Starlite: "A lot of people have been saying that I'm a rotten prat and that I'm greedy and I should give it to the world… [but] that's one of the reasons I've tried to stay keeping hold of things. I've said it often enough that we'd like to give protection but not to cause devastation."

With the emergence of the World Wide Web as the principal research tool of the late 1990s, I imagined that keeping track of Starlite would become easier – but it has simply got more baffling. Maurice's own website (www.Starlitetechnologies.com) initially related some of the history of Starlite, including such dubious gems as a photo of Maurice standing in a row with some of the scientists at the chemical company Bayer. This information was subsequently replaced by photos of Maurice at racetracks and references to his successes in the field of harness racing, a hobby he took up in his sixties.

Web searches revealed only a handful of collectors who, like me, had been making a patchwork of Starlite references over decades. It seemed there was a community out there intermittently googling the word Starlite, because any blogged information elicited wistful responses from people who had known or met Maurice way back. One 'SidVic40' wrote: "I met with Maurice several times years ago… He was/is deeply distrustful of business and like most inventors his 'ownership' of the idea was an obsession. Even though I have a track record of nurturing and supporting the commercialisation of 'mad' ideas from a talented inventor (much like Maurice) I couldn't get through to him and gave up trying. I really hope you succeed where I failed. Wish him well."



ABOVE: Maurice Ward with his 'gubbins', simple materials and equipment required to produce Starlite.

In 2009, Starlite again received mainstream attention when Rose George wrote an update on the saga in the *Daily Telegraph*, including an interview with Maurice himself, conducted, at his request, in a Hartlepool primary school. She even got to touch The Philosopher's Stone – Ward had a piece of the "unparalleled and almost unbelievable" substance in his pocket: "'Here,' says Maurice Ward, handing over a creamy small square. 'That's Starlite.' It's a piece of plastic that bends in all directions, with a charred mark the size of a coin on one side. 'That's from the nuclear blast,' says Ward. 'Don't worry, there's no nuclear stuff on it. I wouldn't have given it to you otherwise.'"

It is this existential dichotomy between the mundane and the magnificent that characterises both Starlite and its inventor. Perhaps a problem of perspective is partly to blame for Starlite's failure so far to reach production: the world simply can't square its tangible insignificance with its monumental implications. Toby Greenbury concurred: "It's difficult to think of another invention that is bigger in its implications. If it had been less important, I think it would have been much easier."

When Ward spoke to Rose George in 2009, however, he said that things were on the move again. Apparently, talks were on with another major aircraft manufacturer, and also an Indian company involving an unnamed product; less ambitiously, there was the Starlite-coated fire door, almost in production by a local company. Moreover, he posted the original *Tomorrow's World* film that started the furore on YouTube, and set up a blog. His rigid business practices had softened, he told Ms George – now he just wanted to market it. Great things, he promised her, were imminent.

Were they? Two years later, Maurice is nearing his eighties, the website is defunct, the blog silent, and there is still no sign of Starlite…

***STOP PRESS:** We made a last-minute attempt to contact Mr Ward ourselves – having located a phone number on an old Starlite-related document – but sadly to no avail. So, if anyone out there is in touch with Maurice, perhaps you could let him know that we'd love to speak to him and bring the Starlite story up to date…*

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

MERRILY HARPUR is a freelance writer, cartoonist and the author of *Mystery Big Cats* (Heart of Albion, 2006). She runs the ABC website www.dorsetbigcats.org.

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The fake, the snake, and the sceptic

STEVE MOORE looks back at Alexander of Abonoteichus, a colourful 'False Prophet' from Roman times, and wonders if he was really a fraud or just suffered from some very bad press ... Main Illustration: **JONATHAN BURTON**

Alexander of Abonoteichus may not be one of the most famous figures of the second century AD… in fact, with a mouthful of a name like that it's surprising anyone remembers him at all. But a Roman emperor threw lions into the Danube on the advice of Alexander's talking snake, so he obviously made, well, a bit of a splash…

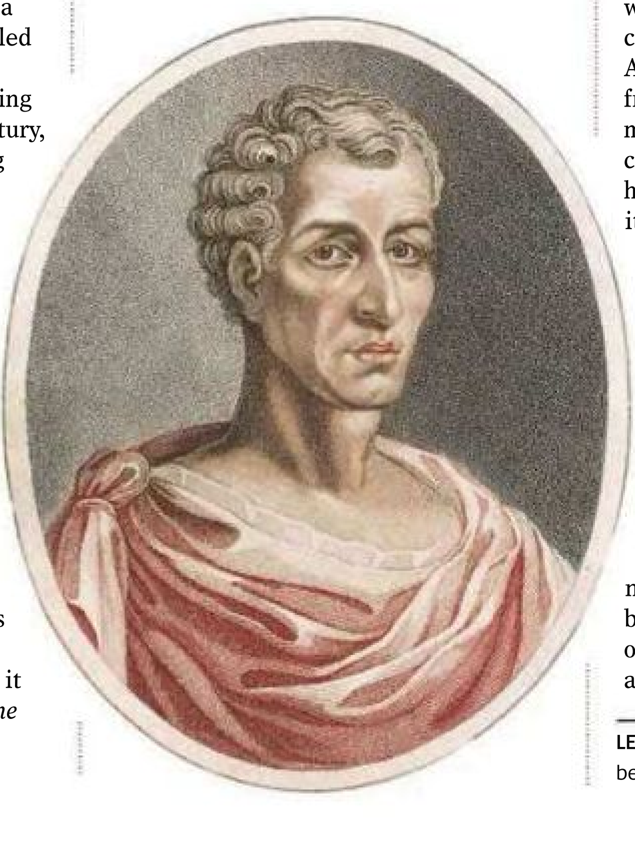
Alexander was born at the beginning of the second century and lived until the 170s. According to his own publicity, he was the prophet of a new god, Glycon, a purveyor of oracles and a healer; to his opponents, he was a charlatan and a conman. But the cult he started appealed to all classes of society and spread throughout the Roman Empire, surviving his own death by perhaps another century, which isn't bad going if he was nothing but a trickster.

We only have one source for his life story, an extremely hostile attack by the satirist Lucian (c.120–180), who came from Samosata in Syria and may have met Alexander in person, probably about 162.[1]

The reliability of Lucian's account is something we'll return to later, but for forteans it has a double interest: apart from the fascinating detail it contains, it shows us a second-century sceptic at work, debunking his subject in a way that would make contemporary hyper-rationalists proud. So, leaving aside any further debate, let's have Alexander's story as it appears in Lucian's essay, *Alexander the False Prophet.*[2]

ALAMY / MARY EVANS

> Alexander became apprenticed to a doctor and magician



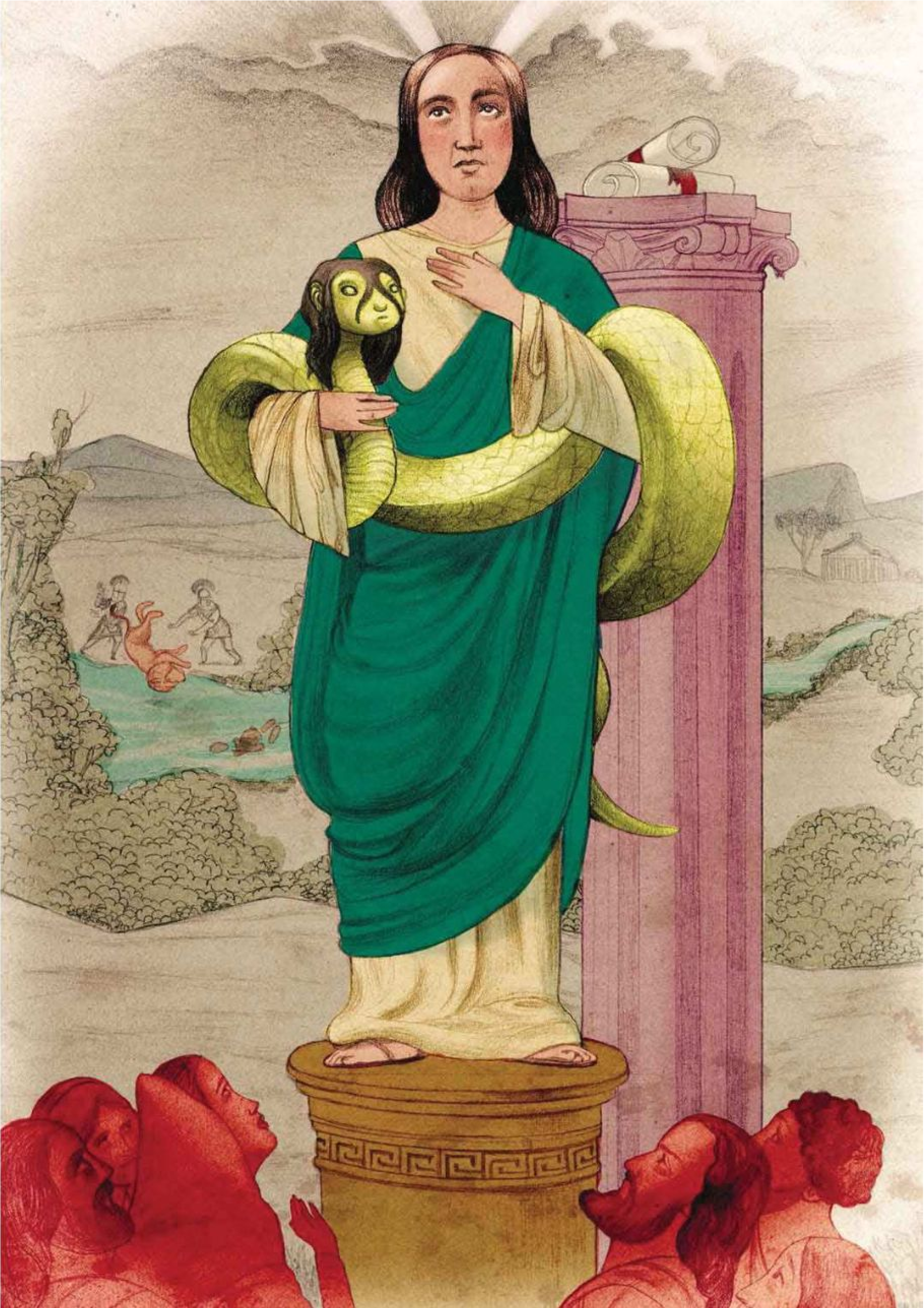
What a cult

Alexander was probably born in Abonoteichus, a small town in Paphlagonia, on the southern coast of the Black Sea. Now known as Inebolu, in the Turkish province of Kastamonu, at the time it was in the Roman province of Bithynia-Pontus.

Alexander is described as tall, long-haired and good-looking, and Lucian accuses him of prostitution as a youth, through which he became apprenticed to a doctor and magician, apparently taught by the Pythagorean philosopher and wonder-worker Apollonius of Tyana (early 1st century–c. AD 98). After the doctor died, Alexander travelled with a chorus-writer from Byzantium nicknamed Cocconas, making a living as quacks, magicians and conmen. Latching on to a rich widow, they headed for Pella in Macedonia, noted for its huge, tame snakes, and bought one for a few coppers. Then, ditching the widow, they decided to set up in the oracle business.

Heading for Chalcedon, they buried bronze tablets in the temple of Apollo, announcing that the god and his son, the healing deity Asclepius, would soon be moving to Abonoteichus. When these were 'discovered' the news spread like wildfire, particularly to Abonoteichus, where the townsfolk began to build a new temple in readiness. Cocconas stayed behind in Chalcedon, composing dubious oracles, and allegedly died from the bite of a viper; Alexander headed home.

LEFT: Roman satirist Lucian accused Alexander of being a prostitute and a conman.



His status as a prophet and healer foretold by similar oracles, Alexander arrived claiming descent on his mother's side from the hero Perseus (he said his father was Podaleirius, son of Asclepius), and chewing soapwort so he foamed at the mouth, an obvious sign of the 'sacred disease' epilepsy. Inserting a live baby snake in a blown goose egg, he hid it in a puddle in the foundations of the new temple. Next morning, he 'miraculously' discovered the egg, broke it, and revealed his new deity: snakes being particularly sacred to Asclepius.

A few days later, Alexander presented his serpentine god to the astounded population, miraculously fully-grown, with a somewhat human-looking head and now called Glycon ('Sweetie'). This, we're told, was the gigantic snake Alexander had bought in Pella, which he held wrapped round his body with its head tucked under his armpit, while holding a false head supposedly made of linen, with horse-hairs inside that could be pulled to make the mouth open and the tongue shoot out. This was displayed to the local Paphlagonians who, Lucian informs us, were renowned for their stupidity, in a small shadowy room where the excited crowd was rushed through as rapidly as possible. Unsurprisingly, the show caused a sensation.

Glycon was said to be a new form of Asclepius and, while Lucian mentions a few cures and ridicules Alexander's 'cytmides', a healing ointment made of bear grease, he implies that the main function of the shrine was to give expensive oracles. The usual procedure was for the consultants to write their questions on sealed scrolls, which Alexander would answer the following morning, apparently without opening them; sometimes withdrawing to an underground chamber overnight, where he received the answers in dreams. Lucian then lists a number of methods whereby the scrolls could be opened and resealed without the original writers being aware of the process.

Other oracles were 'autophones', apparently spoken by Glycon himself. Lucian says this effect was achieved by making a long tube of crane's windpipes, which ran from the linen head of Glycon to an assistant in another room, who then provided the answer.

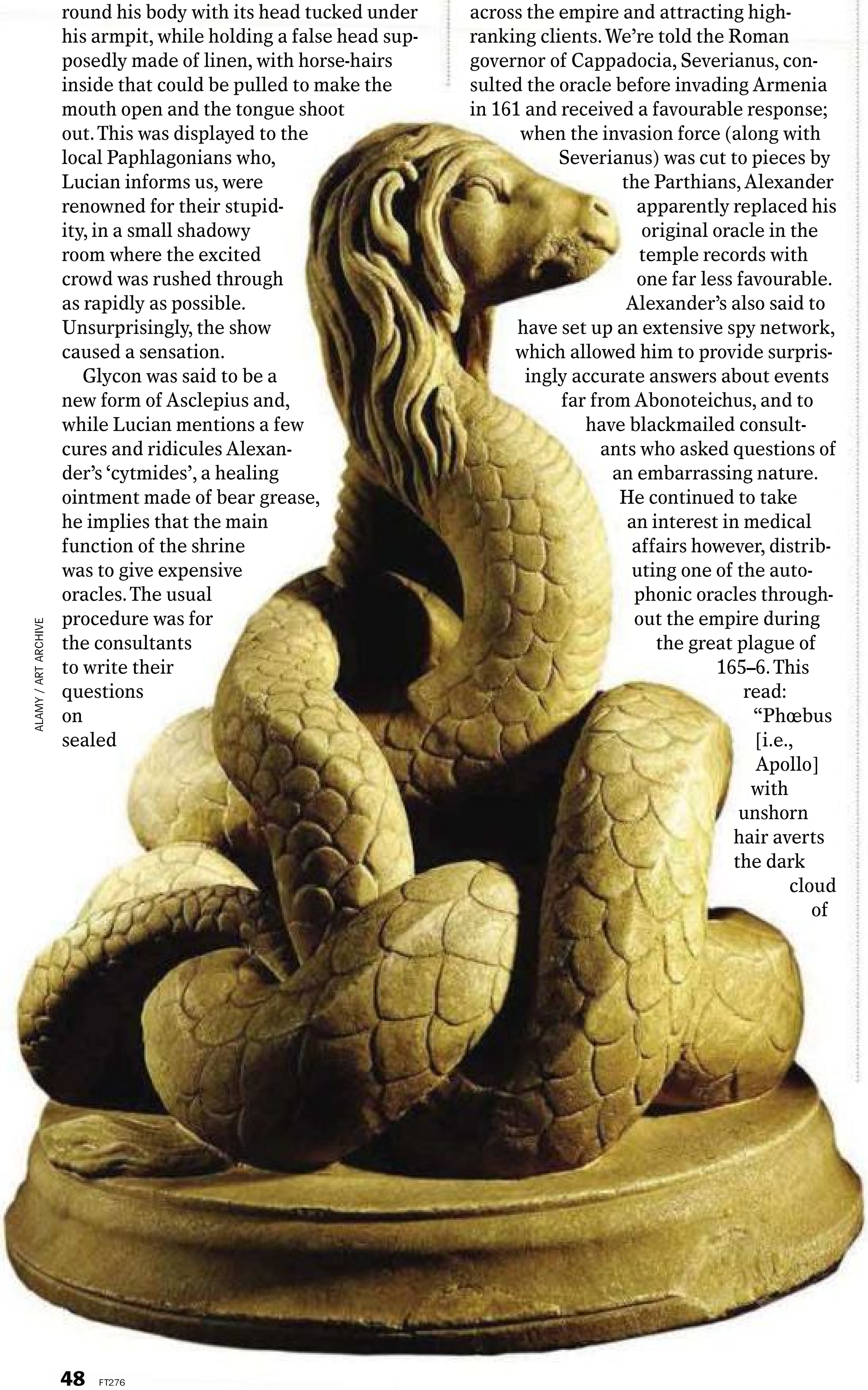
The shrine was an enormous success, soon became rich, and supported a large staff of servants, secretaries and oracle-interpreters, its reputation spreading across the empire and attracting high-ranking clients. We're told the Roman governor of Cappadocia, Severianus, consulted the oracle before invading Armenia in 161 and received a favourable response; when the invasion force (along with Severianus) was cut to pieces by the Parthians, Alexander apparently replaced his original oracle in the temple records with one far less favourable. Alexander's also said to have set up an extensive spy network, which allowed him to provide surprisingly accurate answers about events far from Abonoteichus, and to have blackmailed consultants who asked questions of an embarrassing nature. He continued to take an interest in medical affairs however, distributing one of the autophonic oracles throughout the empire during the great plague of 165–6. This read: "Phœbus [i.e., Apollo] with unshorn hair averts the dark cloud of the plague" and was written over the doors of houses to ward off the disease. Lucian implies that deaths were higher in houses where this charm was used, though he points out that this could have been because the inhabitants relied on the god rather than taking other, more necessary precautions.

Possibly Alexander's greatest coup, however, was to bring under his spell an ex-consul and provincial governor called Rutilianus, who provided him with some extremely high-status contacts. Rutilianus was already 60 years old by this time, but seems to have been a tireless promoter of the oracle's virtues. Alexander eventually married his daughter to him… a daughter he claimed to have fathered on the moon-goddess Selene.

This story also formed part of a celebratory three-day festival imitating the Mystery rites performed at Eleusis in Greece. After a preliminary 'expulsion' of any Christians and Epicureans (noted for their worldliness) who might be attending, this included torchlight processions, initiations and various ritual re-enactments showing the birth of Apollo and his son Asclepius, the epiphany of Glycon, the marriage of Podaleirius with Alexander's mother, and finally the romance between Alexander and Selene that resulted in the birth of Rutilianus's wife. This last Lucian portrays as a sort of religious sex-show, claiming that Alexander's mistress, a girl called Rutilia, was lowered from the ceiling to embrace him on stage, in full of view of her husband (the similarity of names need not cause surprise: if the girl was born to a family who were clients of Rutilianus, she'd perhaps be named after their patron). At other times, Alexander would show off his apparently golden thigh, thus claiming kinship with the ancient sage Pythagoras, who had one also.

The temple also featured choirs of young boys, sent from neighbouring cities to serve a three-year term, whom Alexander is accused of sleeping with, along with the wives of all and sundry, many of the latter proudly boasting about his fathering their offspring.

Alexander's most famous stunt, though, occurred during Emperor Marcus Aurelius's war against the Quadi and the Marcomanni, Germanic tribes from north of the Danube, between 168 and 174. Having contacts at court through Rutilianus, Alexander proclaimed an oracle saying a great victory would be won if two lions were thrown into the Danube. The lions swam to the north bank, where the Germans promptly despatched them with clubs, thinking them some strange sort of dog. The ensuing battle resulted in a disaster for the Romans, with 20,000 dead. Alexander fell back on the old excuse that the oracle hadn't actually said *which* side would win…



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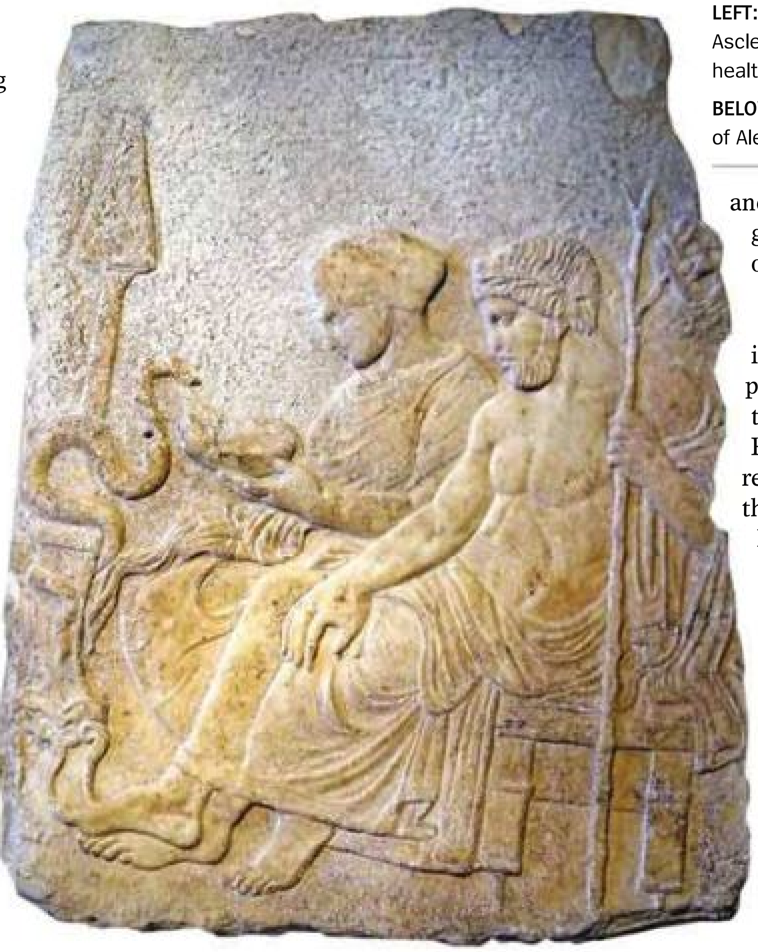
ABOVE: Glycon, the long-haired, horse-headed snake oracle of Abonoteichus, found at Tomis.



LEFT: A bas relief showing god of medicine Asclepius with daughter Hygeia, goddess of health.

BELOW: Moon goddess Selene, allegedly one of Alexander's lovers.

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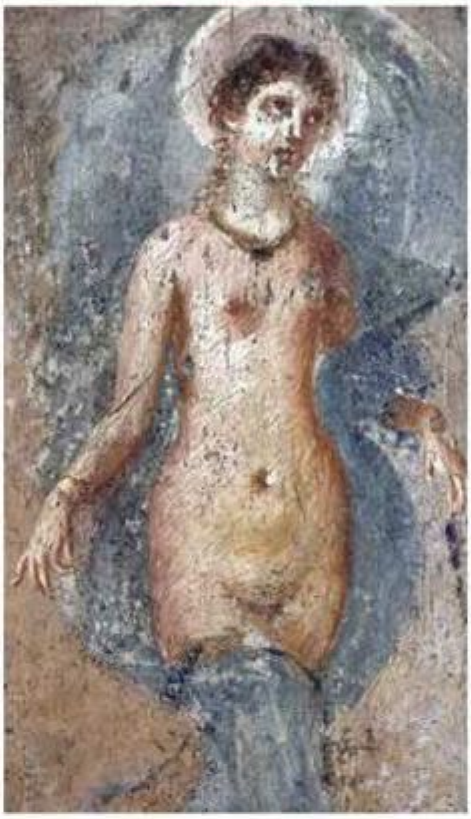
Lucian claims to have visited Alexander, calling him by his real name rather than 'Prophet', biting his hand when it was offered for kissing and testing his oracular skills with various misdirecting questions, as well as trying to persuade Rutilianus against his marriage.

However, he later placated Alexander, who offered to provide him with a boat and crew to continue his journey along the coast. The crew were, naturally, paid to murder Lucian and throw him overboard; rescue only coming when the tearful captain persuaded his sailors against the crime. However, Lucian was dissuaded from prosecuting Alexander by the provincial governor, Avitus, for fear of upsetting Rutilianus.

Lucian imputes one more act of hubris to Alexander, which was persuading the emperor to change the name of Abonoteichus to Ionopolis, and to issue coins bearing Glycon's image. Finally though, despite predicting he would live to be 150, Alexander died at the age of 70, when his leg became gangrenous to the groin and infested with maggots. After his death, a contest arose over who should control the shrine, with Rutilianus judging the outcome… though ultimately he decided that none of the contestants was worthy of the prize.

Alexander presented his serpentine god to the astounded population



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A load of old corroboratives

While Lucian's is the only literary account we have of Alexander and his cult, there's some corroboration for it from archæological finds. Perhaps the most startling of these was made in 1962, at Constanta on the coast of Romania, once the ancient city of Tomis. A collection of statuary dating from the Severan dynasty (193–235) was excavated, including a magnificent marble statue of Glycon, complete with long hair and human ears. Also present was a statue of Asclepius and several of Hecate, who, while not directly cognate with Selene certainly has lunar attributes; an interesting conjunction in view of Alexander's 'Mystery' celebrations.[3] Smaller, bronze statuettes of Glycon have been found at Athens, testifying to the spread of the cult.

Images of Glycon, usually showing his hair, also appear on coinage of the period, sometimes accompanied by the new god's name. These spread through the Balkans and Turkey, and range in date from the mid-second to the mid-third century, long after Alexander's death.[4] Again, the anti-plague oracle has been found inscribed at Antioch in Syria.[5]

The name of Abonoteichus was actually changed to Ionopolis (from which the modern name Inebolu derives), first appearing on coinage from between 161 and 169, the period of Alexander's greatest influence.[6] And the names of the notable Romans Lucian mentions are known to history as well. M Sedatius Severianus was, indeed, the Roman governor of Cappadocia, and his disastrous expedition to Armenia is a historical fact. P Mummius Sisenna Rutilianus is recorded as consul for 146 and held the governorships of Asia and Upper Moesia, while L Hedius Rufus Lollianus Avitus is similarly known as the governor of Bithynia-Pontus.[7]

Lastly, there's an inscription naming a priest of Apollo at Cæsarea Trochetta in Lydia (southern Turkey) as "Miletus the son of Glycon, the Paphlagonian", which some have taken as supporting evidence for Lucian's account of Alexander's promiscuous fathering of children.[8]

The case against the prosecution

Strangely, the authenticity of Lucian's description of Alexander is rarely questioned. Introducing his translation, Harmon remarks: "Without doubt his account is essentially accurate."[9] Again, Stephen A Kent has constructed an entire psychological hypothesis that Alexander was a 'malignant narcissist' who can be usefully compared to modern cult leaders such as Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh by reading Lucian's work, effectively, as history.[10] Perhaps it's time to re-examine his account.

Little is known of Lucian's life. Trained in rhetoric, he made his living as a satirist, touring the Roman Empire and reading his works to live audiences though, as he says, at the age of 40 he gave up rhetoric for 'philosophy'.[11] However, the great majority of his surviving work is comedy. As a satirist, then, he might be compared to a modern stand-up comedian, writing his routines and then touring them round the provinces, and his tale of biting Alexander's hand sounds very much like exaggerated comedian's patter. A hint as to his 'philosophical' activities is found in one of the few independent mentions of Lucian that survives.

This occurs in a work by the famous doctor, Galen, only surviving in Arabic, and it's assumed that the transliteration 'Luqiyanus' refers to Lucian (whose name in Greek would read 'Lukianos'). Here he's said to have made up a book of meaningless sayings and attributed them to the ancient philosopher Heraclitus. This was then passed to a famous contemporary philosopher, who apparently "managed to make sense of it". He also discredited certain grammarians by getting them to elucidate meaningless expressions he'd made up himself.[12] Rather than being a largely unbiased witness, as Harmon and Kent would have him, this makes Lucian sound much more like a 'professional troublemaker'.

Reading Lucian's account in full, one's often reminded of contemporary sceptics and professional magicians. Lucian knows how an effect *could* be produced – therefore that's how it *must* be produced. Take the speaking tube of crane's windpipes, for example. This is certainly possible, and the Christian writer Hippolytus (c.170–c.236) mentions similar speaking tubes used to make skulls appear to speak.[13] However, this doesn't *prove* that's how Alexander made Glycon 'talk'. An early form of ventriloquism would explain the effect much more elegantly, in the same way that some form of glove-puppet would provide a simpler answer than a linen head manipulated by horsehair; and no one at the shrine would have been likely to reveal the secret of either of these to Lucian. In boasting that he knows how the trick was done, Lucian is plainly covering up the fact that this can only be a matter of conjecture. These conjectures *may* be very close to the truth; but they remain conjectures, not proof.

Similarly conjectural are Lucian's exposures of the ways in which the seals of scrolls could be removed, such as sliding heated needles between the impression and the scroll. Again, Hippolytus has a section on such methods, though his material seems to be quoted from another source.[14]

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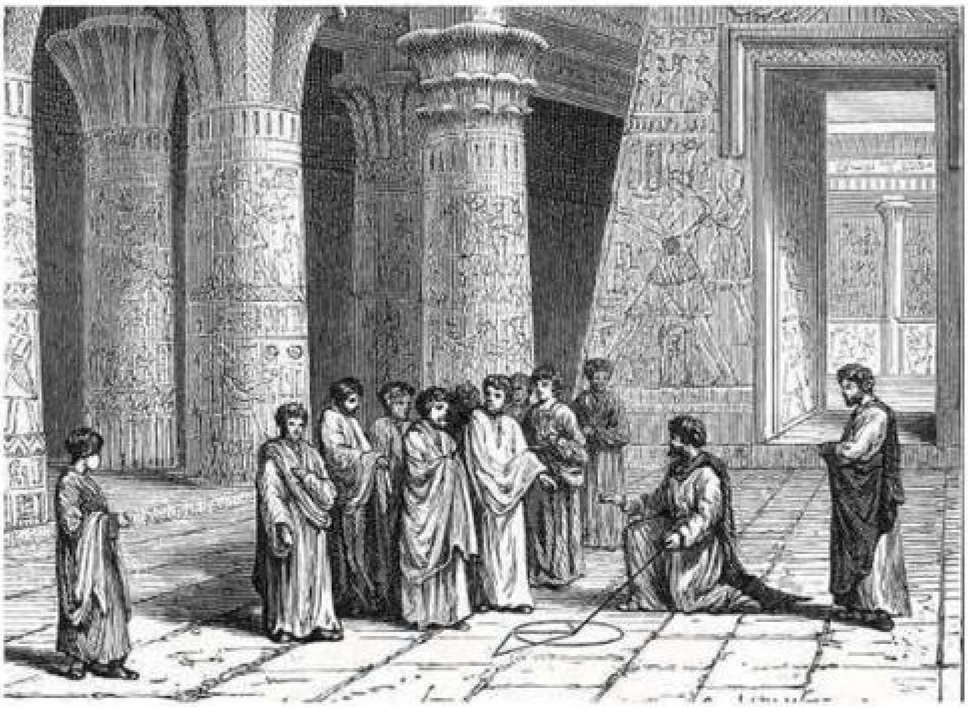


ABOVE: Apollonius of Tyana visiting Alexandria and impressing locals with his learning.

Lucian's treatise on Alexander is actually addressed to a certain Celsus who, we learn, had also written a book against sorcerers with similar examples,[15] and there were probably others in circulation.

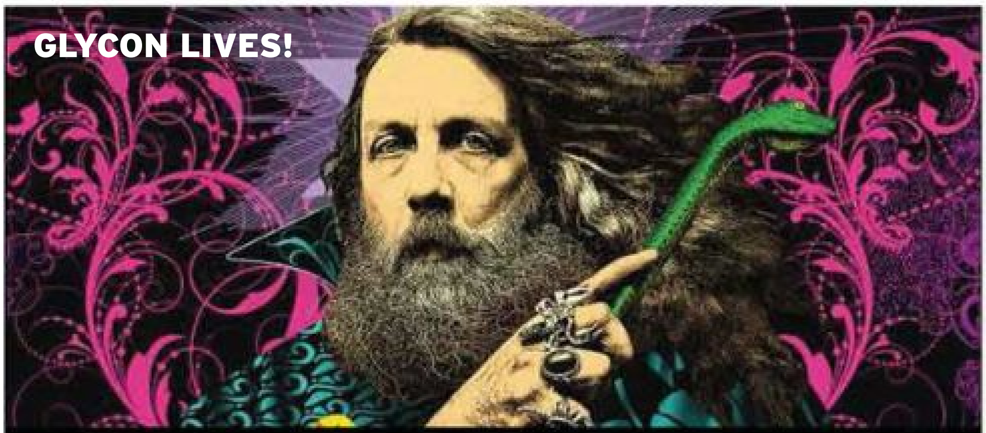
Alexander's taking of the scrolls to his 'inner sanctuary' (*adyton*) and giving the answers the following morning after dreaming the responses looks slightly less suspicious when we consider that the same procedure was followed at the famous oracle of Apollo at Claros, to which fraud, while possible, was not normally imputed; also, the *adyton* is an underground chamber, and it's now known that withdrawal to a cave or subterranean chamber to obtain visions and mystic revelations was a common practice among Greek seers, being used similarly to a modern sensory deprivation tank.[16] Of course, neither of these arguments exonerates Alexander, but they do make his behaviour considerably less unusual.

Lucian claims to have been working against Alexander in collaboration with the disciples of an Epicurean philosopher named Lepidus,[17] and it's possible that he learned about the prophet's past history from them, or from tales told in Rutilianus's circle, who Lucian claims to have known. But in the absence of further corroborative evidence, we have to treat his biography of Alexander with caution.

To accuse someone of male prostitution in his youth was a commonplace of ancient invective; it's hardly likely the information was volunteered by Alexander himself, so we can only treat this as scandal. His early companion, whose real name Lucian obviously doesn't know, only saying he was *nicknamed* Cocconas, is equally suspect. The name can be translated as 'nut' or 'seed', but it also carries the slang implication of 'testicle',[18] appropriately for a writer of false oracles accused of 'talking bollocks'. Again, one has to wonder how Lucian got the story of their early adventures. Hardly from Alexander, so it's either scandal or possibly, taking Lucian as a satirist rather than a historian, entirely fictional. One certainly suspects a fictional element in the story of Alexander's buying the large snake from Pella. This was the birthplace of Alexander the Great, who was supposedly sired by Zeus in the form of a snake, a parallel so obvious it immediately raises suspicions of satirical mischief-making.

Similar objections can be raised about

GLYCON LIVES!



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In the modern world, the most notable adherent (if not the only one) of Alexander's snake-god, Glycon, is the well-known author and magician, Alan Moore, whose work includes *Watchmen*, *From Hell* and quite a lot else. Moore finds a fraudulent glove-puppet a suitable deity both for mystical explorations and for puncturing the pretensions of supposed sages and hyper-rationalists alike. He was introduced to Glycon by Steve Moore, whose relationship to Selene is well-known (**FT272:65**), whereupon they decided to form the Moon and Serpent Grand Egyptian Theatre of Marvels, a completely public yet secret magical dis-Order, which has no specific teachings, seeks no members and cares nothing for its reputation, yet has somehow managed to stage half a dozen magical performances and evocations of place in various parts of the country, all of which have been released on CD. Taking its inspiration from the mysteries of Glycon and Selene performed at Abonoteichus, the Moon and Serpent claims (when it can be bothered) a direct lineage from Alexander, in that there seems to be absolutely no evidence of any other Glycon worship between the original establishment and Messrs Moore and Moore. Frequently to be seen carrying a snake-cane in honour of his deity, Alan Moore's private magical workings with Glycon are, of course, private...

much else in the narrative. Alexander obviously wouldn't reveal the tale of the blown egg so this, while possibly true, is again conjectural, similar arguments applying to the accusations of blackmail, of the vast spy organisation, and the abuse of the boy-choirs. And the tale of Lucian's narrow escape from the ship's villainous crew, saved only by the honest, weeping captain, is such a commonplace of the ancient Greek romantic tale that it's hard to take seriously.

There's one last matter that, to me, raises a doubt about Lucian's account, which is his description of Glycon having a "slightly human" head. Looking at the extant statues, the shape of Glycon's head is frankly inhuman, and has two features Lucian fails to mention at all. One is the obviously human pair of ears, the other the long hair, the latter confirmed by coins bearing Glycon's name (right). A hairy snake would seem worthy of remark or, in Lucian's case, downright scoffing. One's left wondering whether Lucian ever saw Glycon face to face at all, and while this may not cast doubt on his claim to have actually visited the temple at Abonoteichus, it does leave one wondering about the extent of his knowledge of the inner workings of Alexander's organisation. Perhaps the author who blatantly claimed to be lying in his ironically-titled satire *A True History* is doing a little lying here as well.

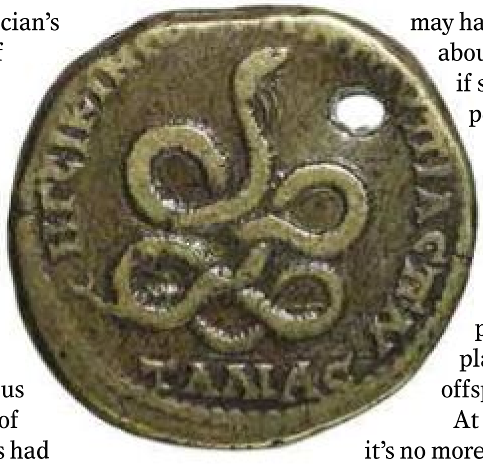
I wouldn't want to be mistaken here. Much of Lucian's account of Alexander and his cult may well, in fact, be true; but I fear that rather too much of it isn't actually *trustworthy*, and we might have a fraudulent account rather than a fraudulent cult.

Alexander in context

For the sake of balance, let's see what sort of picture a more charitable interpretation of Alexander might provide.

The second century was a time of religious ferment: apart from the gradually strengthening Christian church, there was a variety of religious movements centring on oriental and Egyptian deities, Gnostics, cult-leaders, magicians, oracles and philosophers. Many of these movements offered the celebration of mystery rites, so Alexander was hardly doing anything unusual. "Giving the public what they want" isn't necessarily the same as "taking the public for a ride" and despite Lucian's racy account of them, we can see that they tend to follow a fairly standard pattern: the epiphany of the deity, the founding of the shrine, and a 'sacred marriage'.

We've seen that Alexander's first teacher was a pupil of the Neo-Pythagorean sage Apollonius of Tyana, and references to the golden thigh, reincarnation and such-like, suggest that Alexander was very much within the Neo-Pythagorean tradition. This was a popular movement at the time, so despite Lucian's attempt to make fun of Alexander's pretensions, we can see that, among second-century religio-philosophical leaders, he was really fairly mainstream.



Robin Lane Fox provides a more balanced view of Alexander than most, pointing out that Perseus was the founding hero of Agai, where Apollonius had once taught, which may not only explain Alexander's claim to descent from this legendary figure, but also raises the possibility that he may actually have been *sent* to Abonoteichus to take over the shrine, rather than the whole thing being a confidence trick.[19]

Oracles, such as those of Apollo at Claros and Didyma, were also experiencing a revival at this time so, again, Alexander's oracle was not unusual as such, although a talking snake-god would certainly be innovative… *assuming* that we can take Lucian's word for this. It's also, plainly, a fraud, but there are different kinds of fraud, especially in matters of religion. No one except the most fervent Christian would believe the communion wafer and wine are *actually* transubstantiated into the flesh and blood of Christ, so this is, effectively, a fraud; but only the most fervent atheist would call it a confidence-trick. And from hoary antiquity, snakes had been associated with Asclepius and his temples; if oracles were channelled through an Asclepian snake-god called Glycon, we may be dealing with a well-intentioned pious fraud as seen through the jaundiced eye of an extremely vitriolic opponent. Of course, we could still be dealing with an outrageous hoaxer and money-grabbing conman… but not necessarily.

Lucian's extended attacks on Alexander's oracles also tend to divert attention from the fact that, quite plainly, he was also operating a healing shrine, many of his oracles actually being about cures for various conditions. As Lane Fox points out,[20] a frequently-asked question at oracles throughout the ancient world concerned the conception of children, and this could explain the inscription mentioning "Miletus the son of Glycon". Miletus's mother may have consulted the god about a fertility problem; if she then conceived, she perhaps attributed the paternity to Glycon. If such attributions were commonplace, this could explain Lucian's slanderous accusations of Alexander's extreme promiscuity and the placid acceptance of the offspring.

At this remove in time, it's no more possible to exonerate Alexander than it is to prove Lucian entirely correct about him; but there are certainly other possibilities than taking Lucian's account at face value – which rather makes one wonder why it has been accepted so uncritically in modern times. Perhaps the answer is that the majority of those dealing with Alexander's story have either been Christian scholars of religion or rationalist academics, for both of whom he provides an ideal whipping-boy. For Christians, his story demonstrates the follies of pagan religion; for rationalists, the follies of *all* religions. There's thus a natural predisposition to accept Lucian's tale; and, besides, when it comes to an entertaining scandal, we all have a tendency to believe the worst about people. Perhaps Alexander deserves a fairer hearing.

Besides, you've just got to love a man with a talking snake. If there were a TV show called *Paphlagonia's Got Talent*, he'd win it hands down… FT

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

STEVE MOORE edited *Fortean Studies* and wrote a lot of stuff. With Alan Moore, he's currently working (very slowly) on the *Moon and Serpent Bumper Book of Magic*.

NOTES

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4 CP Jones: *Culture and Society in Lucian*, Harvard UP, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1986, p138.

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17 Costa, *op.cit.*, p139; Harmon, *op.cit.*, p211.

18 Costa, *op.cit.*, p261.

19 Lane Fox, *op.cit.*, p246.

20 [*ibid*], *op.cit.*, p243.

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The Fortean Times Random Dictionary of the Damned

compiled by the Hierophant's Apprentice

No 39: MIRACLES

Jesus of Nazareth turned the water into wine at Canaan, and fed 5,000 people with no more loaves and fishes than you can count on two hands – maybe fewer. Before that, he was born of a virgin. The prophet Mohammed refused to perform miracles in order to 'prove' the truth of his message, although some regard his renowned Night Journey as a teleportation from Mecca to Jerusalem. Others insist this was a spiritual journey – and not to Jerusalem, but to a mystical 'highest horizon'; in any case, the miracle, if such it was, was performed upon the Prophet, not some supernormal act of his own that affected someone else, and thus was unlike Jesus's raising of Lazarus from the dead. Despite Mohammed's implicit criticism (and perhaps political caution), saints of the Sufi mystical tradition of Islam didn't shrink from miraculous deeds, according to the hagiographies: they are credited with healing the sick, rainmaking, restoring sight to the blind, and the capacity to read minds. One, the Persian poet Rumi (1207–1273), was said to be capable of *buruz*, 'exteriorisation' – the ability to be in several places at once: one night he reportedly turned up at 17 parties at the same time, and composed a poem at each one. How times – and parties – change. As might be expected, the progenitor of these Abramic faiths, Judaism, is no stranger to miracles: both Elisha and Elijah, for instance, prefigured the story of Lazarus by raising the dead, while in modern messianic Hassidic sects tales of miraculous healings and the like are ubiquitous. The Talmudic attitude to miracles is a little more subtle, as we'll see shortly when looking into the Oven of Akhnai and witnessing God having a right good giggle.

NOT EVERYONE IS IMPRESSED

There is a long tradition of scepticism toward miracles, of course: Aristotle had little time for them; Spinoza sounded like a contemporary sceptical ufologist in suggesting that if we had all the facts to hand, there would be a rational explanation for them. Enlightenment philosopher David Hume commented that "No testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact which it endeavours to establish." The late, great zetetic Marcello Truzzi reformulated this idea for today's readers as: "Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence." Hume's contemporary, Thomas Paine, was more forthright: "All the tales of miracles, with which the Old and New Testament are filled, are fit only for impostors to preach and fools to believe."

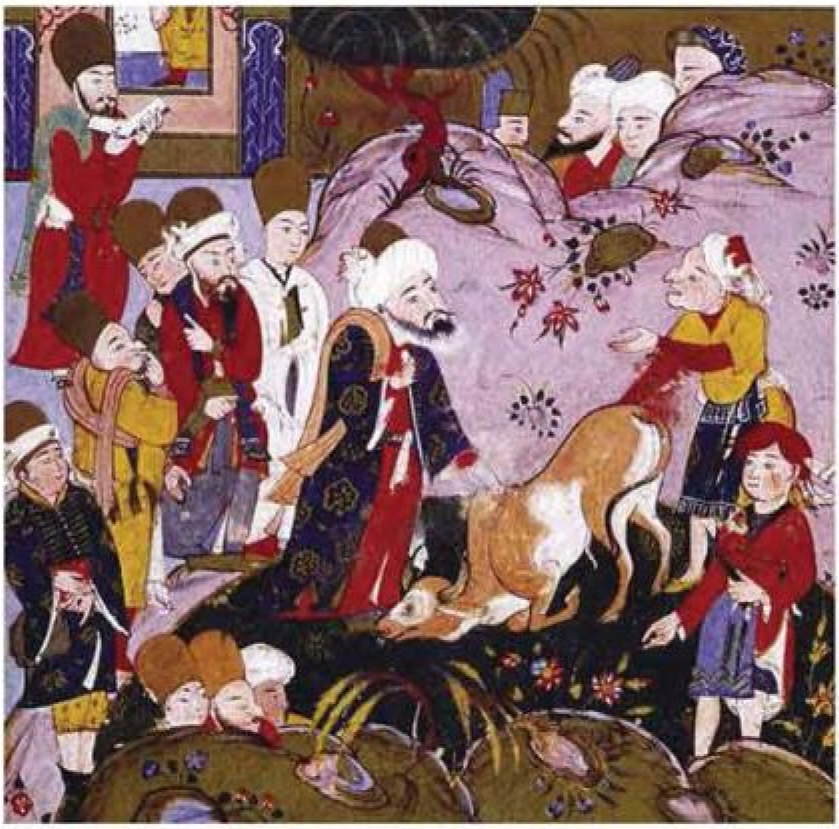
Fr James Keller (1900–1977), a distinctly evangelical Roman Catholic, surely risked heresy in remarking that if miracles occurred, they implied that God was not just or fair: "If God intervenes to save your life in a car crash, then what was he doing in Auschwitz?" Keller's fatuous argument has been well stuffed by the present Archbishop of Canterbury, who has pointed out that the Holocaust was (rather obviously) a product of human free will, not of God's 'permission'; and those of us familiar with Viktor Frankl's work have evidence enough that God was *in* Auschwitz, if not of it. Richard Dawkins (b.1941 and miraculously still alive), whose nose is everywhere but is nowhere wanted, considers miracles a violation of the principle of Occam's Razor (*Entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*: "Do not multiply hypotheses unnecessarily"). Fair enough; and we'd like to know more about how William of Occam reconciled his insight with his vocation as a God-fearing Christian friar.

Readers can scarcely not have noticed that, so far throughout this entry, there has been an implicit connection between miracles and religious belief, even among sceptics and scoffers. Our Oxford dictionary confirms the idea, defining a miracle as "a surprising and welcome event that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws and is therefore considered to be the work of a divine agency". Certainly, both religious canonical texts and apocrypha like to include accounts of miracles: one (albeit shaky) tradition says the Buddha too was born of a virgin, for instance; he himself was averse to miracles. Even so, many are ascribed to him, and many of his most highly realised followers reportedly performed them. A modern legend has it that when the Dalai Lama went into exile in 1959, the word went out: “No miracles.” If true, this was presumably a political decision, designed to curb the scope of cynics; on the other – cynical – hand, it may have been designed to limit opportunities to expose sleights of hand and other tricks, which would bring the lamas into disrepute.

But reports of miraculous events are not limited to a religious context. If miracles do indeed occur as reported, they may happen in any number of contexts.

FORTEANA: SECULAR MIRACLES?

Cast an eye down the contents page of that excellent compendium, *Phenomena: A Book of Wonders* by the semi-legendary duo of John Michell and Bob Rickard (Thames & Hudson 1977) and you’ll see that about 40 per cent of the chapters cover bizarre events free of any religious link or tendency: frogs and toads found alive in lumps of coal, mysterious flows and oozings, spontaneous human combustions, levitations, stones that move and/or grow… and so on. These are all, in Thomas Aquinas’s phrase, “outside and beyond the order commonly determined or observed in nature”.



PARTY POET: The 13th-century poet and mystic Rumi was said to have appeared at 17 parties at the same time – and to have written a poem at each one.

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Michell and Rickard reproduce (p71) a letter to *The Times* written on 17 September 1862 by one John Scott, of which this is an excerpt:

1. My wife is prepared to state that she herself, many years ago, saw one of her father’s workmen split open a piece of coal, and discover in the middle of it a moderate sized frog or toad (she is not sure which) alive, and able to move, and she remembers distinctly the oval shape and smooth surface of the hollow where the animal had laid.

2. Samuel Goodwin, a stonemason, whom I myself have known these five-and-twenty years, and who is very trustworthy, states as follows:– “When I worked in the quarry at Kettlebrook, with Charlie Alldridge, we sawed a stone through about four feet [1.2m] thick, quite solid, and in the middle was a toad about the size of my fist, and a hole about twice the size. We took it out, and it lived about half an hour, and then it died. We worked the stone, and it was used as a plinth-stone in the Birmingham Town-hall.”

Leaving aside the obvious problems with this letter as ‘evidence’ and taking it at face value, what it describes is miraculous, in the sense that what has occurred here is officially ‘impossible’, but nonetheless is so. There is no plausible scientific explanation for live toads surviving in tiny chambers inside lumps of rock; while frogs – earliest known example, approx. 200 million years ago – did not move upon the face of the Earth when the carboniferous forests flourished, between 359 and 299 million years ago. At the ‘woo’ end of the explanatory scale, frogs have to be time-travellers as well as have the ability to hold their breath for rather a long time. At the zealous debunker’s end of the scale, hypotheses multiply with equal fervour.

We might regard the levitations of Scottish-American medium Daniel Dunglas Home (1833–86) in a similar light. Granted, Home was no stranger to séances, whose ostensible purpose was to demonstrate that there was life after death, which suggests a religious impulse. The otherwise trivial or tasteless demonstrations of strange powers in séance rooms – floating trumpets, accordions that played themselves, weird noises from tables, ectoplasm oozing from unmentionable orifices – make a kind of sense only if their ultimate source is divine plenipotence – otherwise, they remain merely trivial or tasteless. Victorian spiritualists, perhaps nervous of being accused of religiosity when ‘truth’ was increasingly identified as ‘scientific objectivity’ – and always keen to attract scientists who would approve their evening spectaculars – tended to identify the medium with the message and the ‘power’. So, in the view they promulgated, if DD Home really levitated, he was responsible for manifesting the phenomenon, however much higher the cause. And if DD Home levitated, he set both Newtonian and Einsteinian gravity by the ears, and performed a miracle.

In the present age, secular miracles abound in ufological discourse. First, the aliens get here at all. Second, they float people through walls, and levitate them (and themselves) to astonishingly un-aerodynamic craft. Said craft reportedly perform ‘impossible’ manœuvres in the sky – such as flying, in the first place – and can interfere with vehicular electrical systems, and so on (and on). There is a mass of commentary that says ufological belief is at heart religious, but the terms in which ‘serious’ ufologists present themselves are remorselessly secular, laying endless claim to a scientific approach. But within the boundaries of our current science, what UFOs and ufonauts do is miraculous.

AN OVEN SHAPED LIKE A SNAKE

If one cares to look for them, one can find splendid deconstructions of how Home appeared to levitate (and created other ‘miracles’). Similarly, one can find plausible explanations for most ufological phenomena and a few for the appearance of live frogs in lumps of coal. The real question, though, is not whether or not the reports of these or any other wonders are true or false, but what use people make of them. To flip the point around, these accounts wouldn’t exist if they had no use, however abstruse or metaphysical, in the real lives of real people. This is the time to peer into the Oven of Akhnai, and at the truly remarkable, yea legendary, life of its great defender, Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus – and his cucumbers. Brace y’self, Sheila, this is gunna be a good one.

Here is the tale[1] as originally told in the Babylonian *Talmud*, Baba Mezi’a 59b. [*Halachah* = legal matters and decisions, based on *Torah* = the law of God as revealed to Moses and recorded in the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures (the Pentateuch).]

We learnt elsewhere: If he cut it into separate tiles, placing sand between each tile: R. Eliezer declared it clean, and the Sages declared it unclean; and this was the oven of ‘Akhnai. Why [the *oven of] 'Akhnai? – Said Rab Judah in Samuel's name: [It means] that they encompassed it with arguments as a snake, and proved it unclean.*

It has been taught: On that day R. Eliezer brought forward every imaginable argument, but they did not accept them.

Said he to them: 'If the halachah *agrees with me, let this carob-tree prove it!' Thereupon the carob-tree was torn a hundred cubits out of its place – others affirm, four hundred cubits.*

'No proof can be brought from a carob-tree,' they retorted.

Again he said to them: 'If the halachah *agrees with me, let the stream of water prove it!' Whereupon the stream of water flowed backwards.*

'No proof can be brought from a stream of water,' they rejoined.

Again he urged: 'If the halachah *agrees with me, let the walls of the schoolhouse prove it,' whereupon the walls inclined to fall.*

But R. Joshua rebuked them, saying: 'When scholars are engaged in a halachic *dispute, what have ye to interfere?' Hence they did not fall, in honour of R. Joshua, nor did they resume the upright, in honour of R. Eliezer; and they are still standing thus inclined.*

GETTY IMAGES / HULTON ARCHIVE

LOAVES AND FISHES: The feeding of the 5,000, one of the many miracles attributed to Jesus.

Again he said to them: 'If the halachah *agrees with me, let it be proved from Heaven!'*

Whereupon a Heavenly Voice cried out: 'Why do ye dispute with R. Eliezer, seeing that in all matters the halachah *agrees with him!'*

But R. Joshua arose and exclaimed: 'It is not in heaven.'

What did he mean by this? —Said R. Jeremiah: That the Torah had already been given at Mount Sinai; we pay no attention to a Heavenly Voice, because Thou hast long since written in the Torah at Mount Sinai. After the majority must one incline.

R. Nathan met Elijah and asked him: What did the Holy One, Blessed be He, do in that hour?

He laughed [with joy], he replied, saying, 'My sons have defeated Me, My sons have defeated Me.'

What, the unversed may legitimately enquire, is going on here?

First, we need to know that Rabbi Eliezer was the foremost scholar and jurist of his generation. He never forgot anything he was taught, and generated legal interpretations the way some Hollywood denizens swap partners. He was said to have produced 3,000 new laws concerning cucumbers; once, even as he was teaching on the subject, freshly-sown cucumber seeds sprang up and produced ripe fruit. He was, thus, in the legendry, not unacquainted with miracles. His wife attributed their children's striking handsomeness to Eliezer's 'demonic' dedication to conjugal delights. He was, then, also no world-shunning ascetic. His opponents were from a rival rabbinical school; the rabbi who approved his excommunication was his brother-in-law. The politics were messy.

The 'official' problem with the Oven, which was reassembled from a previous broken one, was that under one legitimate interpretation of the law – and remember, these men were *lawyers*, not just priests – it was ritually impure; under another (Eliezer's) it was not. Decisions regarding purity, traditionally administered through the Temple in Jerusalem, were in flux after its recent destruction in AD 70. Bear in mind the family relationship involved, and it is clear that Oven had landed in an almost perfectly-formed liminal space in the theocratic arrangements of the time. The Oven of Akhnai could stand for the law itself, a cobbled-together thing of dubious wholesomeness.

God disagrees with all the rabbis but Eliezer, although the voice from heaven in Hebrew is a *Bat Kol*, a "daughter of a voice", like an echo. The majority in turn reject His authority, which makes God laugh with joy, even though R. Joshuah's riposte is a perversion of Exodus XXIII:2, which actually says: "Thou shalt **not** follow a multitude to do evil." (We said these men were lawyers. As R. Epstein's footnote drily remarks, "this is a remarkable assertion of the independence of human reasoning." Indeed. And *akhnai* means 'snake', by the way.)

DID IT HAPPEN? IS THE WRONG QUESTION

There's general agreement that the legend signifies the final withdrawal of God from the world, and His delight that his children have matured enough to insist on making their own decisions through argument – R. Joshuah's rebuke to the tumbling walls of the *Beit Midrash* is literally translated as "when scholars are besting one another" – and logic. Where does that leave R. Eliezer's miracles? Cutting no ice with most Jewish jurists, evidently.

Bear in mind Eliezer resorted to miracles only after presenting every imaginable legal argument ("every argument in the world" in some versions). They are a manifestation of God's approval, although the walls of the schoolhouse are strangely conscious of what's going on and respect both points of view. Yet in the end even God accepts defeat in this dispute, and with pleasure and grace. Whether He accepts the invalidity of miracles *per se* is open to question, but the thrust of the tale is surely that He concedes that miracles do not an argument make, let alone a proof.

If one accepts the lesson of *Akhnai*, then, it's irrelevant to ask if miracles 'really' occur or not. For whether they are secular, profane, or divine, they prove nothing in themselves. Certainly not the existence of God or the ability of frogs to travel through time. We believe Charles Fort would be entertained by this point of view.

NOTE

[1] This is R. Dr Isaac Epstein's translation; the punctuation has been slightly amended and the passage paragraphed. The vast Soncino Press edition of the *Talmud* is now, heaven be blessed, online. Start at http://bit.ly/g51vVN (come-and-hear.com). The story of the Oven of Akhnai is probably the most famous of Talmudic stories, but perhaps not famous enough in some quarters. There is a magnificent treatment, placing the tale in its ancient and modern legal contexts – the implications are not always comforting – *and* its theological one, by Prof. Daniel Greenwood, at http://bit.ly/fBK45I (people.hofstra.edu). There were several sequels to this story, outside our scope here, which deepen its meaning and ambiguity: see Prof. Greenwood's article for illumination.

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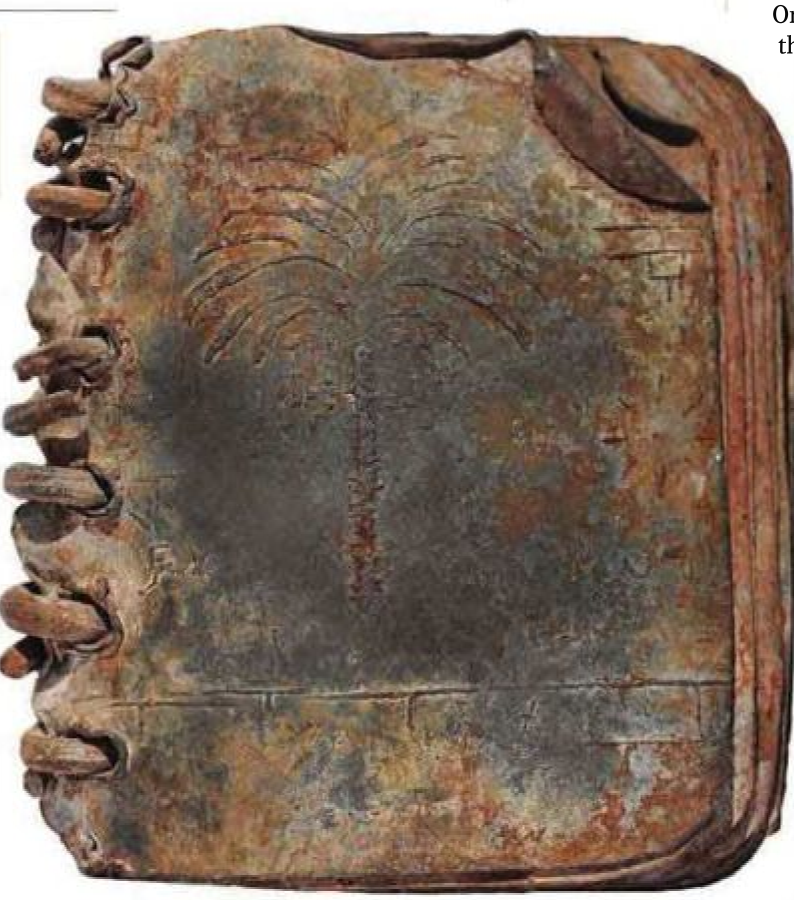
HAVE YOUR SAY

forum

Cod codices?

ANDREW SMITH questions whether the lead codices that recently made the headlines are really first-century Christian artefacts; indeed, he argues, they look more like fakes.

ANDREW PHILLIP SMITH editor of *The Gnostic: A Journal of Gnosticism, Western Esotericism and Spirituality* and author of *A Dictionary of Gnosticism* and other books.



REX FEATURES / DAVID ELKINGTON

In early April 2011, newspapers began printing pieces on newly discovered lead codices from Jordan. "Could this be the face of Jesus?" they asked of a small relief image of a beardless young man. Other images included palm trees, a nine-pronged menorah candlestick and a picture map of Jerusalem with a cross outside the city walls. Many of the plates had inscriptions in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. Some were sealed, like the sealed book mentioned in Revelation 5. A small credit-card-sized plate was touted as an identity card used by early Christians.

Such a find would indeed be remarkable. Unless we are willing to include the Turin Shroud, various saints' bones and the holy foreskin(s) of Jesus – all, we might say, somewhat disputed – we possess no artefacts whatsoever from the earliest Christian period. The only second-century artefacts are manuscript fragments of the gospels and epistles. The very earliest of these is P52, a papyrus fragment of the Gospel of John, dated palæographically to around AD 125, give or take 25 years.

But there were inconsistencies in the story early on. The initial report of the find in the *Jewish Chronicle*[1] described a cache of 20 codices, which were associated perhaps with very early Kabbalah and the messianic figure of Simon Bar Kokhba. The man responsible for most of the following publicity, and for emphasising the possible Christian associations, was David Elkington.[2] An Irish citizen of Anglo-Irish origin, Elkington grew up in the southern hemisphere before his parents settled in England, where he attended a state school. In the mid-1980s, he walked around Europe dressed in a monk's robe in the process of finding himself. Later, when employed as a lecturer at a sixth-form college, he saw a thief breaking into a vehicle in the school car park; Elkington donned his cowled robe and frightened off the intruder, a story which he says was reported in the national press and even made it into *Pravda*. His 2000 book *In the Name of the Gods* speculated on the vibrational properties of language, religion and ancient monuments.[3]

Elkington first heard about the find from a journalist in England and travelled to Jordan to investigate. The codices are the property of Hassan Saida, a Bedouin. One version of the story says that he saw them washed out of a cave after a flash flood, making them the property of the state of Jordan. However, Hassan Saida also says that they have been in his family for 100 years. Elkington and a BBC team attempted to approach the cave but were shot at and later received death threats.[4] The codices were smuggled into Israel, apart from two plates which Elkington took to Britain, one of which was shown by him on a BBC news programme.[5] Elkington told me that he was intending to return the two plates to Jordan during Easter week.

One scholar, Margaret Barker, felt that the imagery matched what would be expected from genuinely first-century Christian material. Another, Philip Davies, Professor Emeritus of Sheffield University and one of the original Dead Sea Scrolls team, also appeared initially to endorse the codices as very early Christian.

However, a third scholar, David Thoneman of Oxford, had been emailed a photograph of a copper plate with Greek text in 2010. Thoneman found that the text was grammatically nonsensical in itself, but belonged to the third line of an epitaph on a tombstone on display at the Amman Museum, Jordan, copied by someone who didn't know Greek: the alphas and lambdas had been mixed up. Thoneman has since said that he would stake his career on the plate being a fake, dismissing the entire collection.[6]

There also seem to be inconsistencies in the Aramaic, mixing scripts from different periods.[7] It might be argued that the 'face of Jesus' resembles portraits of Alexander the Great, or of the Sun god Helios from coins minted in Rhodes, or even of the so-called Mona Lisa of Galilee, a mosaic discovered in 1987 and dated to the third century. A relief of a crocodile on another plate has a curious resemblance, some say, to modern rubber toy crocs.

The Christian interpretations are Elkington's. The proposal that the small plate is an identity card is entirely speculative. Yet when scrapings from two lead codices were tested, the results matched a first-century provenance. And they are not reproductive forgeries that resemble any existing objects, hence the reluctance of Philip Davies to dismiss them as fakes.

Perhaps the cache is a mixture of modern forgery, using ancient materials, and genuinely old, but historically insignificant, materials. **FT**

NOTES

[1] http://bit.ly/huo28l (thejc.com).

[2] I held a 45-minute phone interview with Elkington on 16 April, 2011.

[3] David Elkington: *In the Name of God*, Green Man Publishing, 2000.

[4] http://bit.ly/fJyz7L (telegraph.co.uk).

[5] Available at http://bit.ly/hYcQSZ (youtube.com).

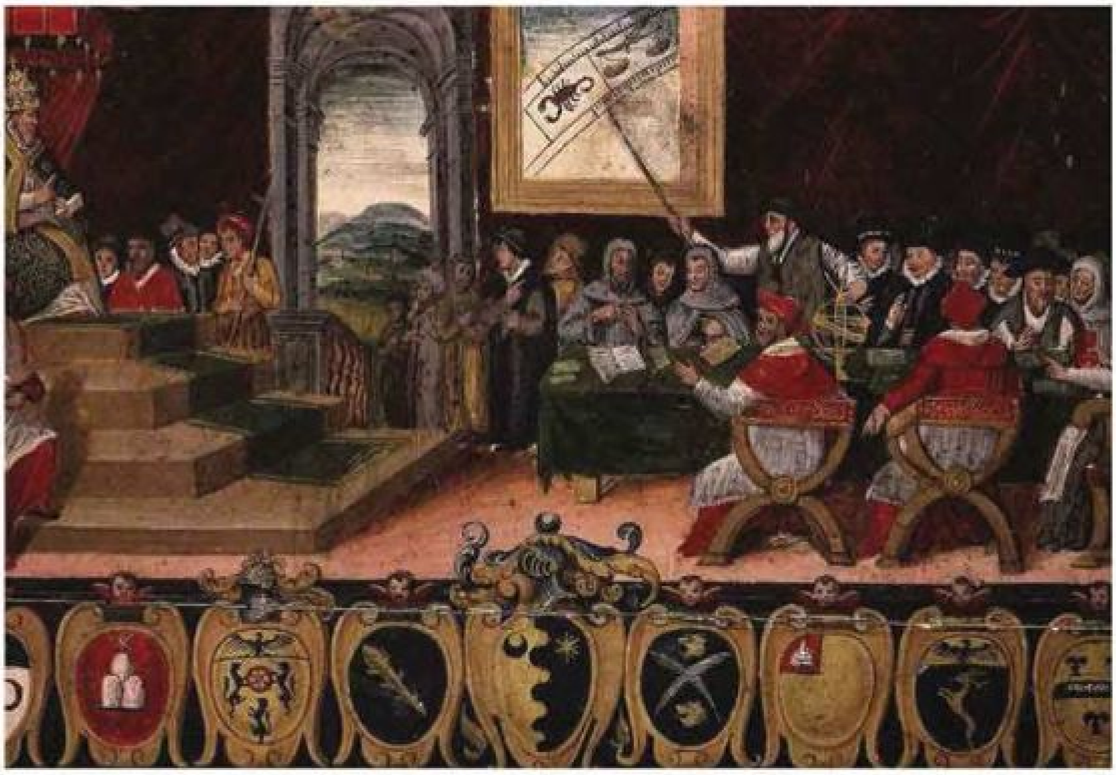
[6] http://bit.ly/hw9mF3 (entertainment.timesonline.co.uk).

[7] See the blog of Aramaic expert Steve Caruso, http://bit.ly/fOZpb2 (aramaicdesigns.blogspot.com). Also http://bit.ly/hFLz5Y (lifeslittlemysteries.com).

Inventing the Middle Ages

JERRY GLOVER explores the Phantom Time Hypothesis – a conspiracy theory put forward by German academics to explain the presence in our history books of some three centuries that, er, never actually existed…

JERRY GLOVER is an independent researcher of historical mysteries, and the only other person to have played the role of Number 6 from ***The Prisoner*** at its original location.



ALAMY / THE ART ARCHIVE / ARCHIVO DI STATO, SIENA, ITALY

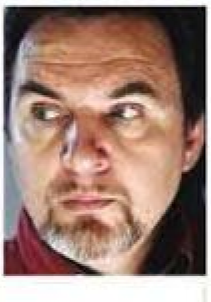
You know what they say about the early Middle Ages, don't you? If you can remember them, you weren't really there. However, if you could recall those times, was this simply because you had been making up the entire era as a state-enrolled forger? If so, this would be explicable by the Phantom Time Hypothesis (PTH), a chronological theory almost unheard of in its radicalism, and which has been propagating steadily through German academic circles since 1998.

Picture a mediæval-style 'Manhattan Project' with scriptoria instead of hangars, and Gothic minuscule instead of maths. Holy Roman Emperor Otto III (980–1002) has engaged his theologians under the leadership of Gerbert d'Aurillac (later Pope Sylvester II) in a project that is among the most zealous and secretive of its kind since the facsimile houses of Alexandria were at their busiest. The gilding of narratives has many precedents in the writing of histories, especially self-aggrandising ones. But the one described by the PTH takes this art of embellishment up a few more notches: more than two centuries worked up from scratch, then infiltrated into as many chronologies as possible. Only a Middle Gothic or a Byzantine fanatic could have taken it to such lengths. But it worked. And as the traces were destroyed, the histories reconfigured and rebound, no one was any the wiser. At least until Heribert Illig and his adherents apparently figured it out.

Illig's theory is rooted in the introduction of the Gregorian calendar in 1582. It had long been known that the old Julian calendar had a defect – the Julian year being roughly 11 minutes too long – and the new calendar was designed to correct this discrepancy, to the tune of making up for 10 days that gradually slipped during the years between AD 1 and AD 1582. But Illig alleged that the Julian calendar should have produced a discrepancy of not 10 but 13 days over the period in question, and concluded that roughly three centuries had been added to the calendar that had never existed. His response was to run with the notion of calendar "slack" and look for corroborative evidence.

> **The historical sources just aren't in the archives**

The obvious period to look at was the most obscure one: the Dark Ages. Byzantinists and architectural historians are largely responsible for giving us the period from c. 600–900, about which almost nothing is known in cultural or urban development. The historical sources simply aren't in the ground or the archives. This raises the 'debate of continuity', explained by groups of 'Gradualists' who bicker learnedly over whether the period happened so slowly that the participants hardly noticed it, or that it was a kind of torpid aftermath from Antiquity's brilliance. The glaring exception here is the Carolingians, and the luminous figure of Charlemagne who is meant to have reigned from 768 to 814. Illig zeroes in on the polymath qualities of Charlemagne as recorded in various texts which make him an architect, astronomer, educator, philologist, folklorist, lawmaker and more. For Illig, "the conclusion is simple: far too much is ascribed to this one person."[1]



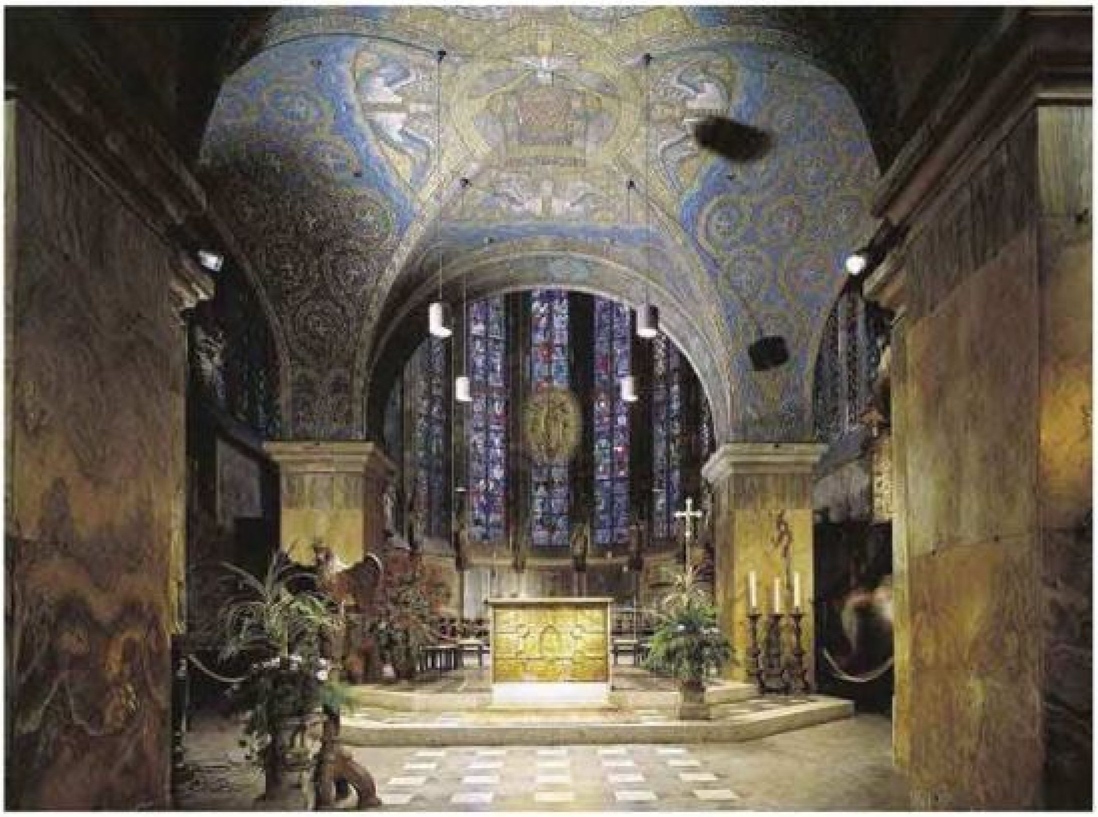
TOP: Church council convened under Pope Gregory XIII to discuss the replacement of the Julian calendar, which took place on 15 Oct 1582.

ABOVE: Alternative historian Herbert Illig.

FACING, TOP: The Palatine Chapel, Aachen, which according to the PTH displays architectural features without historical precedent.

FACING, BOTTOM: Charlemagne – too much of a polymath to be true?

Speaking of these texts, Illig stresses that "[T]he number of genuine documents diminishes all the time. In fact, it's moving towards zero." The physical sources of this period are best embodied by the Aachen Palatine Chapel; yet its anomalies, which include a dome without a precedent (or a Carolingian successor) and the lack of a building tradition in the 400-year gap between the Romans and the Franks,[2] makes Illig certain that: "Carolingian buildings do not fit into the history of the arts as it is taught today." Taking the Palatine Chapel out of the Carolingian Renaissance removes the 'ecclesiastical heart' from the Frankish Empire. "With the



GETTY IMAGES / DE AGOSTINI / A DAGLI ORTI

loss of this dome alone," says Illig, "the tradition of Charlemagne's giant empire crumbles to dust."[3]

Others who've taken up the Phantom Time Hypothesis find evidence from further east. Uwe Topper and Manfred Zeller use the PTH to resolve such problems as why the architecture of the Umayyads has untypical characteristics;[4] why Arab coins under the caliph Abd al Malik bear the portrait of a dead King; and why the famous historical epic, the *Shahnameh*, wraps up in the mid 7th century AD, with a gap of 300 years to its time of writing in AD 1010, and has no allusions to Islam. From this they discern a phantom time period of 78 years that came into being "through artificial separation of the Persian and Umayyad history which in reality was contemporaneous".[5] This puts the origin of Islam in a bit of an awkward spot, but may at least remove some of the mystery from its near-miraculous success. The history of the dynasty of Harun al-Rashid, greatest of the Abassid caliphs, with all the expeditions he led and the diplomatic gifts he gave to Charlemagne (including a clock that dropped bronze balls into a bowl, and two albino elephants) were dreamt up at a scribe's desk.

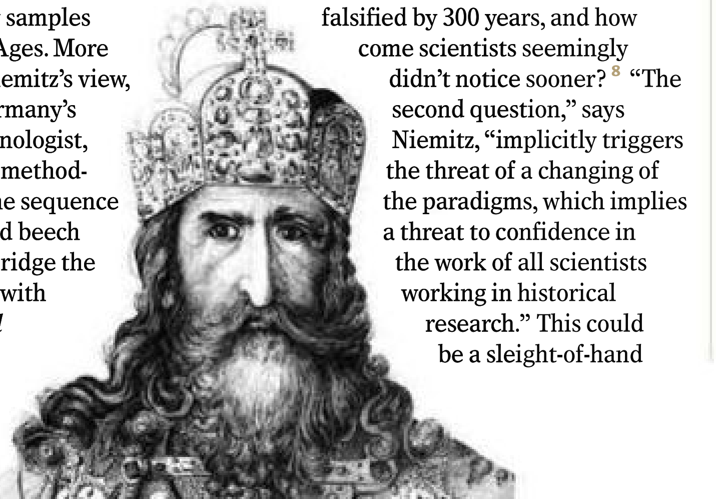
Phantom Time is also borne out by Jewish history, which "totally disappeared together with the breakdown of the Roman Empire", not resurfacing in evidence until the Carolingian period.[6] The difficulty Dr Hans-Ulrich Niemitz sees with archæological sources, for which he cites the absence of German town stratigraphies from the relevant era and the achingly slow development of north German ceramics from the 7th–9th centuries AD, is that it is not dated independently of written sources. This contravenes proper archæological method. Specialists referring to neighbouring disciplines to solve their problems, Neimitz argues, fall into circular reasoning, discounting the whole situation and thus missing the bigger picture.

Also discussed by Niemitz is dendrochronology, or tree-ring dating. The field has only recently bridged all the gaps in European history over two millennia; but, says Niemitz, this achievement relies on far too few samples to date the Middle Ages. More pointedly still, in Niemitz's view, Ernst Hollstein, Germany's leading dendrochronologist, fatally changed the methodology by allowing the sequence samples to admit red beech (alongside oak) to bridge the critical 8th century with a sequence *predated by historians*. An archæological no-no, you'll recall. Hollstein despaired that: "It is strange, but it has proved extremely difficult to connect the Merovingian wood samples from excavations with the above mentioned chronologies," and that "all attempts to get enough tree ring sequences from timber of the Carolingian times have failed…"[7]

Illig offers hypotheses and suspects for this grandest of deceptions. The first is that Otto III had his teacher, Gerbert d'Aurillac, the best-read man in Christendom, direct the production and insertion of 300 extra years because he wanted to be 'Christian Man of the Millennium' in the year AD 1000 (in the event, two years before Otto's death). Or did Constantine VII (AD 905–959) rewrite Byzantine history by having the monks convert every single piece of Greek majuscule into the new minuscule script, before destroying the originals, changing all existing texts in two generations, or even faster?

Niemitz's two key questions are: when, how, and why was history falsified by 300 years, and how come scientists seemingly didn't notice sooner?[8] "The second question," says Niemitz, "implicitly triggers the threat of a changing of the paradigms, which implies a threat to confidence in the work of all scientists working in historical research." This could be a sleight-of-hand argument, when a more pointed question might be: what's the point of going to all the trouble? What's to be gained? If the Otto III scenario is to carry any weight, the question of motive cannot be brushed under the carpet, as Niemitz wants it to be. The Emperor must have been very concerned indeed about his image in history, since his bogus chronology could only have been written with posterity in mind. Why? Because the great majority of those who would have been able to consume it at the time Otto III was alive *were already involved in faking it*. Practically everyone who mattered within the Emperor's dominion would have been complicit, negating its intended effect.

Perhaps this is beside the point. As exponents of the PTH are mindful, it is an idea that challeges what is considered to be immutable, exposing weak points and championing the need for more interdisciplinary study. There is also a call for research to be done outside the usual group, since, as philosopher of scientific breakthroughs Thomas Kuhn has explained,[9] only a few scientists are willing to reopen research into a problem that the group considers to have been solved (sometimes on the word of a single expert). I suspect economists know well how true this is – as do forteans. Enough uncertainty exists over inconsistent Dark Ages knowledge, and how the evidence has been interpreted and assembled, to make such a project perfectly conceivable; and, in my view, more research across disciplines is a prime pathway towards gaining a better sense of how and why History comes into existence. FT



GETTY IMAGES / HULTON ARCHIVE

NOTES

[1] Heribert Illig: "The Invented Middle Ages" (essay); see http://bit.ly/lK4qei (bearfabrique.org).

[2] The lack of physical traces of Viking raids in the Frankish Empire, for example.

[3] Illig: *op. cit.*

[4] The first Arabic dynasty, AD661–750.

[5] Dr Hans-Ulrich Niemitz: *Did the Early Middles Ages Really Exist?*, rev. vers., 2000.

[6] Cecil Roth: *The Dark Ages: Jews in Christian Europe 711–1096*, 1966, p162.

[7] E Hollstein: "Dendrochronologische Untersuchungen an Holzern des fruthen Mittelalters", In *Acta Præhistorica* 1, 1970, pp147–156.

[8] Sir Isaac Newton was dissatisfied with the Classical Mediterranean chronology, changing the dating of the Trojan War and Rome's Founding.

[9] Thomas S Kuhn: *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, 1970.

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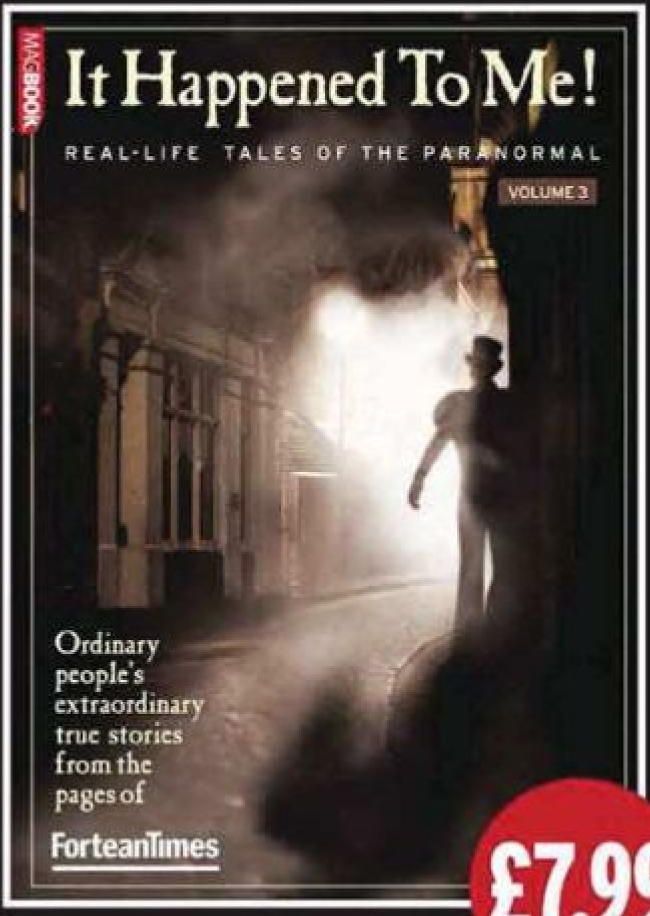

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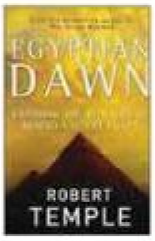
reviews

Who built the Giza monuments?

A new dating technique suggests the pyramids are several centuries older than orthodox Egyptology believes, and their builders also constructed stone circles



Egyptian Dawn

Exposing the Real Truth Behind Ancient Egypt

Robert Temple

Century 2010
Hb, 514pp, ind, £25, ISBN 9780712684149
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £22.50

Robert Temple's latest book continues a line of research from *The Sphinx Mystery* and to some extent *The Crystal Sun*. The historical and archæological consensus on ancient Egypt barely conceals a scene of chronological chaos; *Egyptian Dawn* addresses the basic questions of who built the pyramids and other monuments that enigmatically litter Giza, and how old they are.

These two questions have been the starting point for fanciful theories which have muddied the already murky waters of ancient history (somehow 'history' seems an inadequate term; speculative hermeneutics might be more apt). However, while Temple has trodden the stranger paths of speculation in the past (*The Syrius Mystery* comes to mind) this book is not a synaptic spacewalk; it is a meticulous piece of research that comes up with intriguing suggestions for the age and origins of the pyramids, Sphinx, and associated temples and monuments.

Temple's colleague in the attempt at dating is a Greek academic, originally a nuclear physicist, called Professor Ioannis Liritzis. Liritzis has come up with a new form of thermoluminescence which he claims can date stone structures. The technique attempts to measure "the date of the last exposure to light of two pieces of stone which have been pressed together"; if it turns out to be accurate and verifiable, it will add a significant new tool to the archæological repertoire.

Temple and Liritzis were lucky enough to get on the right side of Zahi Hawass (the field could open up again following the events of the 'Arab Spring'). Thus they got permission to test the technique on a number of important Egyptian sites, including Abydos, and some structures around the Giza complex itself. The dates derived from the tests imply that some or all of the structures are older than previously accepted by mainstream Egyptology, in most cases by a matter of several hundred years.

Temple also looks back at the work of some eminent Egyptologists, including Petrie and Breasted, and comes up with a number of sensible criticisms of current chronologies. These revised dates have a tendency to support the results derived from their new dating technique; this is either evidence that Temple is really onto something, or that the momentum of his theory impels him towards supportive data.

Temple's answer to the other question – who built the pyramids? – is that the people who built the megalithic structures around the Atlantic seaboard also built in Egypt. This is not a completely original idea; as long ago as 1976, John Ivimy, in his book *The Sphinx and the Megaliths*, suggests as much, and Ivimy may not have been the first. To support his theory, Temple springs a few archæological surprises, the best of which for this reader was the discovery (again, not originally Temple's discovery, but in this case he is the first to make it well-known) of stone circles and megaliths across the whole of North Africa from Libya to the western coast. The biggest and most impressive of these is in Morocco, where there is also evidence of early cyclopean construction.

> "The builders of these monuments were keen – and competent – astronomers"

Temple suggests that these people, experienced sailors, traders in tin for the making of bronze, settled large parts of the Atlantic seaboard stretching from Africa, through Spain and France, to Britain and Scandinavia. They built megalithic circles and dolmens (and other more enigmatic structures) wherever they settled. It has been clear since the pioneering work of Alexander Thom that the builders of these monuments were keen – and competent – astronomers. Temple adds that they knew about both *pi* and the golden section. Certainly both these proportions can be found in the monuments.

Temple offers some beguiling evidence for this thesis; however, there are a couple of central problems which he fails to address. These are to do with technique and motivation. He may be saving this part of the investigation for a later publication; but the absence of reference to such questions in his current book troubles this reader.

Though building something on the scale of Stonehenge, for instance, requires great skill, there is a step change between its rough-hewn rocks and the precision we see in ancient Egypt. What brought about such a change in technique, and why do we not see more of it elsewhere? Where is the evidence for a transition from one form of building to the other?

The second problem is related. What compelled the extra precision of the Giza structures? Temple makes the point that the ancient Egyptians were obsessed with calendrical accuracy, but he never speculates as to why. He also suggests that megalith builders were interested in astronomical observation because it helped their seafaring prowess. Ancient Egyptian culture was relatively sedentary, however, and it is not at all clear why they might need the greater accuracy.

These questions haunted my reading of *Egyptian Dawn*, and I am curious to know if Temple is similarly troubled. In most other respects, this is a cogent and rewarding book (Temple's ideas about the Egyptians using a geopolymer to mould their stones also leaves a few uncertainties; again this is not an original idea, and I don't recall any acknowledgement from the author in this regard) but the why and how of the historical process he is claiming are too important to be left to one side.

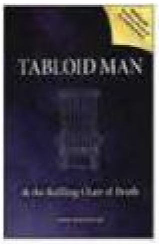
Noel Rooney

Fortean Times Verdict

A THESIS WITH SOME LACUNÆ, BUT TOO IMPORTANT TO IGNORE **8**

Hack history

Ever wondered how the schlock horror stories make it into the press? Read on…



Tabloid Man & the Baffling Chair of Death

Paul Bannister

Bannister Books 2011

Pb, 221pp, £12.00/$12.00, ISBN 9781456581800

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £12.00

Nicholas Tomalin said that a journalist required only "rat-like cunning, a plausible manner and a little literary ability". (He later admitted he'd stolen this *bon mot*.) Paul Bannister's book rollicks along with more than a little literary ability. He was on Fleet Street in the days when tabs reporters took the diaphragm out of public phones so their rivals couldn't file copy, and always carried a spare one. This blood-and-guts approach suited his future employer, the *National Enquirer*. It was the baby of Gene Pope, who "smoked like a test chimpanzee", looked like the janitor and was the godson of Mafioso mobster Frank Costello. (The *Enquirer* moved from its original New York home to Florida after gangland-related difficulties.) He was also an MIT graduate and, reputedly, a former CIA psychological warfare agent.

The *National Enquirer* ran "black and white stories that were often only half-truth stories": as the editor said, "Debates only confuse the reader." It also covered the occult, unlike most other media outlets at that time. Bannister had written a freelance piece about the Baffling Chair of Death, whose occupants died in accidents, apparently, though not at the feverish level the *Enquirer* wanted, and when he arrived in Florida, Bannister became its specialist in matters supernatural. As the *Enquirer*'s correspondent for Washington seer Jeane Dixon, he had to separate her semi-religious visions from her more accurate political predictions and, on one occasion, 'remind' her of the facts of her UFO abduction. He did a series of pieces on Edgar Mitchell, who had a psychic experience on Apollo 14, and on Hal Puthoff and Russell Targ's nine-year, $1.1M psychic spying research programme for the CIA. Some stories were spiked: the trace of radiation leading from the temple door to the altar of a Hindu temple could not be verified, so Erich von Däniken's assertion that it was a body shop for busted alien airships didn't stand up. He had better luck with finding pictures of ancient flying saucers in Mexico's Baja desert, which were bolstered by Jesuits having recorded, in the 1500s, that the locals believed in men who came from the skies.

A UK visit led Bannister to visit Maurice Grosse and the Enfield polt, which growled in his ear. Back in the States, he met George Owen, a professor at the University of Toronto, who was experimenting with levitation and, later, worked on making up a ghost with a history and personality "to demonstrate the power of concentrated thought". Owen's team didn't succeed, but an Australian group created 14-year-old Skippy Cartman, who communicated through raps and knocks.

Not all Bannister's assignments dealt with the *outré*: he also investigated a talking cat and a signing gorilla. The narrative weaves tales of rat-like cunning, psychic adventure, derring-do, and the eventual decline of the *Enquirer* after a change in the public's taste – and an anthrax attack.

Read all about it.

William Darragh

Fortean Times Verdict

YELLOW PRESS JOURNALISM AT ITS MOST REPELLENTLY AMUSING **8**

Memoirs of a Dervish

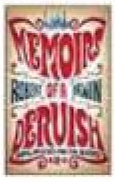
Sufis, Mystics and the Sixties

Robert Irwin

Profile Books 2011

Pb, 239pp, illus, £14.99, ISBN 9781861979919

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.49



In 1965, the young Robert Irwin, burning with a mad hunger for mystical adventure, hitched his way down from suburban Surrey to war-torn Algeria and presented himself at the *Zawiya* of the Sufi Shaikh Ahmad ibn Mustafa al-'Alawi where he was invited to wash in the *hammam*, roll out a mat on the floor and become an initiate into the order's mysteries. He found himself living in a world where – perhaps aided by his spiritual intensity and near-starvation diet – he witnessed wonders and miracles on a daily basis. He spent weeks at a painful pitch of religious ecstasy; he saw his fellow *faqirs* bilocate and walk through walls, and during the sacred dance sessions he regularly joined them in going *melboos*, the term for a convulsive episode somewhere between divine possession and epileptic seizure.

When he returned to his studies at Oxford University in the autumn, "my face had changed, I had a hungry ascetic look and my eyes were searching distant horizons". Life in England was a freewheeling but unrewarding procession of drugs, boredom, mediæval history, anarchism and hopeless love affairs. He graduated and moved to London, where he lived in a room barely large enough for a bed and immersed himself in occultism, Arabic and surrealism, wandering through iconic hippie scenes like the UFO Club and Middle Earth and sampling every esoteric society he could find, including a black mass at the Process Church ("it was not Satanism, but merely theatre"). He returned to Algeria to find the *Zawiya* riven with political tensions, and *faqirs* and the local police alike suspecting he was a spy.

In later life, Irwin would put all these experiences to spectacular literary use in his mindbending novels *The Mysteries of Algiers*, *The Arabian Nightmare* and *Satan Wants Me*. Here, he takes a wry, honest and frankly baffled look back from the distance of half a lifetime, combing through diaries of dreams and pretentious ramblings and trying to reconstruct what he thought he was doing. How could he have been so intensely engaged with life and so miserably bored by it at the same time? Was he mad, or just pretending to be? Were all those miracles the peak experiences of his life, or meaningless distractions from it? His spiritual hunger has receded with age, as the world has become "more solid and less prone to revealing gaps and anomalies"; but in the process "I have lost the capacity to be astounded and I am sad about that".

Mike Jay

Fortean Times Verdict

WONDERS AND MIRACLES FROM THE ARAB AND HIPPIE WORLDS **9**

The Amazing Story of Quantum Mechanics

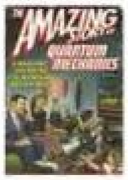
A maths-free exploration of the science that made our world

James Kakalios

Duckworth Overlook 2010

Pb, 318pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, PRICE?,
ISBN 9780715638187

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £10.80



Over the years, I've read numerous introductions to quantum physics, beginning with *The Dancing Wu Li Masters* in the early 1980s. But James Kakalios's *The Amazing Story of Quantum Mechanics* has just supplanted George Gamow's *Thirty Years that Shook Physics: The Story of Quantum Theory* as my favourite guide to this enigmatic area of science: and not just because he cites Doc Savage, The Shadow and Dr Solar alongside Einstein, Pauli and Bohr. You would be hard-pressed to find a more understandable introduction to quantum mechanics – which, after all, touches all our lives, from smoke alarms to computers, from TV remotes to MRI scanners.

Kakalios – who judging by his books must be a fantastic lecturer in his day job as professor of physics at the University of Minnesota – covers quantum theory's core elements, such as wave function, the Schrödinger equation, and quantum tunnelling. Even if you've read popular introductions before, Kakalios brings the story up to date, explaining, for example, how flash drives and blu-rays work and how they got their names.

While Kakalios is never superficial, he's always entertaining. The book's packed with anecdotes – such as the kitchenware company which included uranium oxide in its bright orange-red glaze in the 1930s. Then there's the U-238 Atomic Energy Lab sold in the early 50s as an atomic version of the home chemistry set. The lab included polonium 210, the same isotope that killed Alexander Litvinenko. And my favourite: the story of how a telephone engineer outwitted a physics postgrad who tried to hack the system – leaving a small card inside the phone saying "Try it now, whiz kid".

For the first time, a book on quantum mechanics made me guffaw.

While Kakalios illustrates his points with numerous examples from pulps and comics, *The Amazing Story of Quantum Mechanics* is worth reading for his superlative explanations, even if you don't know Kent Allard from Andrew Blodgett Mayfair. To take just one example, Kakalios deftly removes the uncertainty surrounding Heisenberg's infamous principle, which must be one of the most misunderstood things in quantum mechanics, at least among the general public. I spotted only one quark-size slip: *Village of the Damned* isn't a Hammer film.

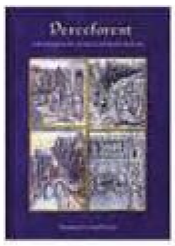
The Amazing Story of Quantum Mechanics reminded me of a literary version of the Royal Institution Christmas Lectures I loved as a kid: intellectually and scientifically rigorous, but with a sense of wonder and humour, as well as infectious enthusiasm. For a popular science book, I can't conceive of higher praise.

Mark Greener

Fortean Times Verdict
AN AMAZING BOOK ABOUT AN AMAZING AREA OF SCIENCE **10**

King Arthur the Greek

One million words distilled into a galloping yarn full of magic and derring-do, with Merlin, Lancelot and the Grail explained



Perceforest

The Prehistory of King Arthur's Britain

Nigel Bryant (Trans.)

D S Brewer 2011
Hb, 815pp, bib, index. £60.00/$99.00. ISBN 9781843842620
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £60.00

Brewer is to be congratulated on its enormous contribution to Arthurian studies over past decades, publishing both translations and general scholarship; and Nigel Bryant, in turn, deserves high praise for this, his fifth lengthy translation from old French in recent years. And this one is very lengthy indeed.

In the original, *Perceforest* is over a million words long so, despite running to some 800 pages, this is an abridged translation. As Bryant states in his introduction, though, the original is frequently repetitious and also contains lengthy descriptions of tournament combat, or of journeys made by the characters, thus providing obvious areas for abbreviation; and all the incident and narrative structure is retained. Bryant's version is, thus, equivalent to a 'short version' that could have been produced by a mediæval redactor; and, perhaps more to the point, publishable as a single, if very large, volume.

While this approach is understandable, it has to be regretted to a certain extent. A little calculation shows that we've ended up with a translation about a third of the length of the original, while the gigantic Vulgate Lancelot–Grail cycle has been translated in full (and recently reissued in 10 softback volumes); given that we now have Bryant's version, it seems unlikely that we'll see a full translation of *Perceforest* at any time in the foreseeable future, almost certainly not within our lifetimes.

On the other hand, though, by retaining all the incident in an abbreviated form, Bryant has given us a delightfully fast-paced read which rattles along through quests, battles, beautiful maidens and enchantments; in fact, having read quite a lot of mediæval romance, I find it hard to think of a work containing anywhere near as much magic as *Perceforest*.

So what exactly is it?

The book seems to have been written in the 1330s, probably at Hainault, in what is now Belgium/Holland. Rather like a comic-book continuity freak who wants to unite all his favourite characters and adventures in a single world, our anonymous author has made a bold attempt to unite the Arthurian chronicle and romance traditions, and *Perceforest* is essentially an almighty interpolation into Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, uniting everything from the arrival of the Trojan Brutus in Britain, mediæval romances about Alexander the Great (portrayed as a lance-bearing knight, of course), to the Roman and Saxon invasions and the extensive adventures of Arthur's forebears.

Before heading off to conquer and die at Babylon, Alexander arrives in Britain with his army of Greek knights, and nominates two as kings of England (Perceforest) and Scotland (Gadifer). Enchanters are destroyed, forerunners of Camelot and the Round Table are established and eventually overthrown, the Grail quest is foreshadowed and the sword in the stone explained, King Arthur's Greek ancestry is established, and we also discover the lineages of other notables such as Merlin and Lancelot. The book also contained the first written, and highly-sexualised, version of the Sleeping Beauty story.

Perceforest is undoubtedly a work of fictional romance, and there'd be little here for those seeking a historical origin for Arthur or insight into the Holy Grail. But it's a rattling good yarn and of considerable interest, not least, given that the majority of the action is set in the centuries before Christ, for its treatment of the pagan gods.

While acknowledging the existence of a 'Sovereign God', pagan deities such as Mars and Venus are treated as independent entities who draw their power from that one God, and who interact with the human characters much as they did in classical epic. This seems a surprisingly enlightened approach for the 14th century, though it's perhaps as well the author was living 150 years before the establishment of the Inquisition.

As a work that's previously been largely neglected, this translation of *Perceforest* is very welcome indeed, but part of me still hankers for the complete version…

Steve Moore

Fortean Times Verdict
A WONDERFUL ADDITION TO THE ARTHURIAN CORPUS **8**

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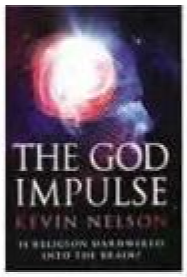
(End of) tunnel vision

A reductionist approach, conflating experience and belief, and omitting current thinking on religion mars the argument



The God Impulse

Is Religion Hardwired into the Brain?

Kevin Nelson

Simon and Schuster 2011

Hb, 320pp, illus, notes, refs, ind, £16.99, ISBN 9781847378316

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE 15.29

Strange things happen at the edges of consciousness, and sometimes we can see things happening in our brains and our blood when they do. These are Kevin Nelson's contentions, and, for some reason, he expects us to be surprised.

This is a book about Near-Death and Out-of-Body Experiences – phenomena which are interesting enough for a while, but which form only a tiny proportion of human mystical experiences.

Drawing on a number of case histories, and taking us in copious detail through the physiology, he concludes (with the grating, icy triumphalism of the New Atheists), that to demonstrate neurological correlates of these spectacular events is to elbow the supernatural out of the world conclusively.

The tunnel through which one processes to meet, according to your background, the Pope, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dubya, an auditor with a clipboard, or your dead grandma, is caused by low blood flow to your retina.

The light at the end of the tunnel, which illuminates grandma's tweed twinset and makes her pearls shine with numinous glory, is down to REM visual activation. You hover over yourself, looking calmly down at the frantic paramedics pounding on your chest, because of temporo-parietal REM deactivation, and your life scrolls in front of you as the hippocampus responds frantically to the adrenaline pumped out by your adrenals, telescoping time and throwing up memories.

Well, maybe. Or maybe not. But if so, so what? Nelson's confident reductionism is unscientific.

To describe accurately what's going on in your neurones when an experience occurs is not to conclude anything at all meaningful about the initiators or the significance of those neuronal events.

I am looking at a computer screen. Given the right technology, it would be possible to describe – even, in a sense, to see – the activity in my retina, optic nerve and brain as the images that represent that screen to me are relayed to my visual cortex and reassembled as a picture of something that my language centres dub 'screen'. Nelson's logic suggests that, because the description is possible, the screen cannot exist. It's a basic, common and corrosive non-sequitur.

This is not to say that the description is pointless. On the contrary, it's fairly interesting to the sort of people who like wiring diagrams. And anything that ignites a healthy scepticism about the religious significance of Near-death Experiences – so naively and so regrettably hyped – has to be good.

But Nelson's conclusion just doesn't begin to follow from his premises.

I might have been more convinced by his conclusions if his survey of spiritual experiences had been wider. Whatever you say about him, God's big, and if you're going to declare him dead, you need to take his pulses in a number of places.

And it would be wise to call in a number of super-specialists to opine on the various indices of death. Yes, there's mention of ketamine, LSD and psilocybin mushrooms, but no real discussion of the 'Hard Problem' – the problem of why I persist in believing that there's an entity called Charles Foster who's in some sort of ontological continuity with the Charles Foster who was here this morning and hopefully will be there this evening.

There's nothing at all about the prevailing anthropological orthodoxy about the origins of religion. The names David Lewis-Williams and Justin Barrett are bizarrely absent.

There's nothing about why superstition so promiscuously erupts, or any tracing of the connections between spiritual experience and religious belief.

If Nelson thinks that experience and belief are identical, that is a grave error, as all writers on the subject would agree. And if he simply wasn't interested in the notion of belief, on the grounds that he's a neuroscientist, he shouldn't have subtitled his book 'Is religion hard-wired into the brain?', and shouldn't have read the rites over the Almighty.

So: if you want an intelligent, reasonably accessible account of some mainstream scientific speculations about the mechanics of Out-Of-Body experiences, this book's for you.

But if you want to see how those experiences mesh with the rest of human spiritual experience, or want to know what, if anything, they say about what it means to be a human being, or if you're interested in the genesis of religion, you'll have to look elsewhere.

Charles Foster

Fortean Times Verdict

OK AS FAR AS IT GOES, BUT THE SUBTITLE IS VERY MISLEADING **5**

Holy Trees and Other Ecological Surprises

Lucy Goodison

Just Press 2010

Pb, 248pp, illus, refs, ind, £12.00, ISBN 9781907352003

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £12.00

This title is from a new imprint, Just Books; if the rest are as well produced, we have some delights in store.

It is a series of essays – part travelogue, part archæological research, part theoretical rumination – around the theme of holy trees throughout Europe. Initially focusing on visions of the Blessed Virgin Mary associated with trees that have since become the centre of a form of healing cult, the author wanders across Europe trying to understand what these trees represent.

She discovers there appear to be links, especially in places such as Crete and Greece, between Christian healing trees and pre-Christian trees on identical sites in some places. However, she does not make any rash assumptions regarding the sites and the practices being evidence of a continuity of beliefs or traditions; rather, she leaves the question open as to the significance and meaning of the similarities.

Beyond the religious nature of the holy trees, she raises other questions regarding the essence of our relationship to the "natural", to ecological awareness, to what some might call "spirituality".

The eclectic nature of the book, which doesn't fit into any single neat category, is exemplified by her drawing on writers such as Carlos Castaneda, and non-Christian religious traditions and practices. Overall, it manages to be entertaining, revealing and thought-provoking. The reading lists at the end of each chapter give plenty of ways of following up on the text. But there remains much to be understood about the phenomenon.

Richard Alexander

Fortean Times Verdict

LOVELY INTRODUCTION TO HOLY TREES AROUND EUROPE **8**

ALSO RECEIVED

BOB RICKARD leafs through a small selection of the dozens of books submitted to Fortean Towers in recent months...

The Psychology of Paranormal Belief

Harvey J Irwin

University of Hertfordshire Press 2009
Pb, pp213, index, refs, £16.99
ISBN 9781902806938

This is not a book for casual reading, but a serious sociological paper on the nature and effects of 'paranormal belief' intended to help clinical psychologists, counsellors, sociologists and parapsychologists structure their thinking about commonly-held "scientifically unsubstantiated beliefs". Irwin, a senior and well-published psychologist, focuses on why people need such beliefs and how they use them. The first chapter finds that what constitutes 'paranormal belief' can vary considerably with type (superstitions, psi, divination, magic, New Age therapies, spiritism, aliens, and religion). Further variables can arise from the way they are studied. Four significant methods are examined here: how such beliefs can be measured, how they relate to social marginality, to one's worldview, and to one's cognitive processes (education, intelligence, memory and reasoning). It culminates in a proposed new model for the context of beliefs in 'paranormality' and the consequences of acting on them which, says Irwin, allows for more complexity than standard models and avoids their "simplistic characterisations of paranormal believers... as socially marginal, subjectively oriented, cognitively deficient, or psychologically dysfunctional".

Astral Projections

Michael Ross

Melrose Books (melrosebooks.com) 2010
Pb, pp183, bib, illus, £9.99
ISBN 9781907040146

The author claims to have had a 'susceptibility' since his youth to float out of his body at times – what used to be called 'astral projection'. Drawing on his diaries, this amicable book is his account of his 40-year search for proof that some part of our being, which he calls the soul, can exteriorise. Here, too, he tells of meeting other "far more proficient projectors" (some of them well-known authors) and reviews the published material on out-of-the-body experiences which has helped him, the benefits of which he passes on to the reader.

What proof there is remains, at best, personal anecdote – otherwise there would be no doubting the ability – but Ross is sure that certain 'energy' exercises helped him. Ultimately, he can only advise us to try them, but he is convinced that the sense of certainty engendered by your first conscious projection is life-changing, as it was for him. An easy read on a challenging subject.

The Secret Art

Duncan Laurie

Anomalist Books (anomalistbooks.com) 2009
Pb, pp201, sources, illus, £12.00
ISBN 9781933665429

Radionics was a popular subject in the first half of the 20th century but it soon faded before the rise of sceptical scientists who attacked it as pseudoscience. It was to physics what homeopathy and faith healing are to modern medicine. That is why Duncan Laurie's history of radionic devices and the people who made and believed in them is valuable.

The core principles of radionics were derived from mediæval medical science, especially the 'doctrine of signatures' by which like was said to cure like – so that plant material that resembled parts of the body was believed to cure ailments of those parts. However, radionics did not stop there. It drafted in esoteric ideas about subtle body energies and it declared that all physical objects and substances emitted energy 'signatures' (described as non-electromagnetic radiation) which left traces in time and space. Inventors developed techniques for 'dowsing' them with diagnostic devices. Covered in dials, they could tune into the 'wrong' vibrations of illnesses and, by correcting them, effect a cure.

Other uses were claimed for such machines, ranging from increasing crop yields to enhancing visionary experiences. Things got pretty weird when operators found they didn't need a physical object to provide a signature; just thinking about it was sufficient. Weirder still, the same effects would manifest if the operator held only a schematic of the device and not the device itself. Art created from the harmonic resonances emitted by radionic devices resembled holographic and sonogram images, a correspondence whose significance was not lost on modern artists such as Laurie.

His detail-rich book also contains the correspondence between John Campbell, then editor of *Astounding Science Fiction*, and Dr Galen Hieronymus in the mid 1900s. Where Hieronymus was hoping to get scientists interested in his radionic device, Campbell was suggesting that its technical construction was largely irrelevant as it seemed to him that 'mental powers' were operating through the 'idea' of the device. A fascinating chapter of neglected history.

The Cryptoterrestrials

Mac Tonnies

Anomalist Books (anomalistbooks.com) 2010
Pb, pp127, bib, illus, £8.50
ISBN 9781933665467

After more than 60 years of much ado and getting nowhere, it is only to be expected that a new generation of Internet-savvy ufologists, fed up with the lack of progress, would strike out on their own. One of these new pioneers in post-Keelian territory is Mac Tonnies, who is also interested in futurology, transhumanism and anomalies on the surface of Mars. Unfortunately, Tonnies – who here calls himself "a theoretical ufologist" – died in 2009, aged only 34. Greg Bishop, in this book's afterword, claims that he was on the way to becoming an "elegant spokesman for the anti-extraterrestrial school".

Eschewing the tired old conspiracy theories on the one hand and visits from flesh-and-blood aliens in nuts-and-bolts craft on the other, Tonnies revisits the early ideas of Vallee, Keel and others, including contactees from Adamski to Whitley Streiber, and tries to make sense of the suggestion that there exists alongside humans "a stealth race of incredibly ancient beings", as Nick Redfern puts it in his foreword. Although I would not go as far as John Shirley, who called this short volume "a *Book of the Damned* for the 21st century", it does indeed offer a fresh glance at an old topic, but more by way of extended musing than carefully plotted argument.

Man-Made Monsters

Dr Bob Curran

New Page (newpagebooks.com) 2011
Pb, pp.185, index, bib, illus, £12.99
ISBN 9781601631367

This is a well-written romp through the bizarre world of 'constructions' – unnatural creatures made up from parts of natural ones. Curran's chapters are populated by the golems of Jewish lore; the automata and homunculi of the ancient Greeks and Romans; the 'brass heads' of the wizards of the Middle Ages; the artificial life-forms of alchemists; zombies, and their modern counterparts resurrected 'universal' soldiers; and various magical and 'scientific' reanimations (including, famously, Frankenstein's monster). Along the way are some fascinating bits of folklore, mythology and oddities from the history of science (such as the young Linnæus, in the 1730s, who discovered that a preserved Hydra from ancient Greece, owned by the Burgomeister of Hamburg and supposedly killed a couple of centuries earlier, was actually a clever taxidermist's fake). A cheerfully grim book that might delight a teenager's curiosity.

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The Twilight Zone: Season One

Dir John Brahm, Douglas Heyes, et al., US 1959
Fremantle Home Entertainment, £34.99/£49.99

Rod Serling's legacy occupies a strange place in the pantheon of TV history. Revered by generations who grew up with his work, he remains curiously unknown to later viewers who daily consume media which bear the unmistakeable imprint of his most enduring creation, *The Twilight Zone.* With hindsight, it's evident that in creating the series, Serling channelled the era's zeitgeist by smuggling social commentary into popular entertainment – a clever way of avoiding the constant censorship his barbed scripts would otherwise have suffered at the hands of corporate sponsors. Little did he realise that *The Twilight Zone*'s heady mix of speculative ideas, social comment and clever twists would define his place in TV history and form the template for so much genre film and television to come. Scanning the episodes from the first season only serves to emphasise this impression, with several stories foreshadowing contemporary works like *The Truman Show* or *Inception*. By the same token, many other episodes seem ripe for 21st-century adaptation.

The Blu-ray/DVD release of this first season (the rest to follow in due course) will no doubt thrill diehard fans who feel that Serling's work has never been properly acknowledged. Technically, the transfers are flawless, having been created from the original camera negatives and with the audio remastered from the magnetic soundtracks. But the real gems are in the extras – the main attraction being a never-before-released 1957 pilot episode, "The Time Element", hosted by Desi Arnaz (best known for his lead role in *I Love Lucy*). This spectacular rarity – the story of a man who has recurring dreams about the bombing of Pearl Harbor – was actually Serling's first attempt to pitch his concept of a weekly anthology series to the networks. Though it bears all the hallmarks of the genre he later perfected, "The Time Element" was shelved indefinitely. Fortunately, two years later a new producer for *Westinghouse Desilu Playhouse* discovered it in the CBS vaults and resurrected the series.

Other highlights include isolated musical scores by Bernard Hermann, amongst others, 18 radio dramas, a slew of interviews with directors and actors involved in the series (from Richard L Bare to Burgess Meredith and Richard Matheson). Of special interest are the episode commentaries from *Twilight Zone Companion* author Marc Scott Zicree, a Serling authority and the man rumoured to be developing a new *Twilight Zone* series entiled *Rod Serling's After Twilight*, which will hopefully feature original ideas by Serling as well as actual narration by him taken from hundreds of recently unearthed audio dictations.

Etienne Gilfillan

Fortean Times Verdict
SEMINAL SERIES FINALLY GETS THE RELEASE IT DESERVES **9**

The Man Who Fell To Earth

Dir Nicolas Roeg, UK 1976
Optimum Home Entertainment, £19.99

Nic Roeg's 1976 film once looked as impressive to me as *Performance*, *Don't Look Now* and *Walkabout*, but returning to it after a long absence I can't help but feel it marked the beginning of Roeg's long decline. The story of an alien who comes to Earth to get water to save his drought-ridden planet and ends up going off the rails after too much gin and television is told through a series of trademark visual tics and elliptical narrative devices that, rather than illuminating the material, seem more like rehashed Roeg-isms used to better effect in his earlier films. At least his habit of casting pop stars (Jagger in *Performance*, Garfunkel in *Bad Timing*) serves him well here, as David Bowie delivers a convincing performance as the fragile (but always stylishly dressed) alien visitor who falls foul of humanity's greed. In fact, he's the best thing in the film, his languid portrait of a stranger in a strange land lending a dignity to proceedings that they don't always deserve. Visually, though, it remains impressive – as this Blu-Ray release confirms – but the welter of (often iconic) images becomes oddly enervating as one tries to prise any real meaning out of Roeg's deliberately obfuscatory approach to narrative, while the seemingly endless sex scenes, shots of Bowie's flapping willy and Candy Clarke weeing herself seem like then-modish efforts to shock the audience. Nevertheless, it's still a film that needs to be seen (probably more than once) and some will continue to value it highly.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict
BOWIE BRINGS STYLE, BUT THE FILM LACKS SUBSTANCE **6**

Norwegian Ninja

Thomas Cappelen Malling, Norway 2010
Entertainment One, £8.99

The great thing about a film with a name like *Norwegian Ninja* is that you can approach it with no great expectations… and then be surprised by something that turns out to be a complete joy.

The real-life inspiration for this bewildering, brilliant com-fu romp is the 1985 arrest of Norwegian politician Arne Treholt, who was accused of high treason and espionage. His collaboration with the Iraqis and the Russians proved to be one of the most serious cases of Cold War-mongering in Norwegian history. In 2006, Thomas Cappelen Malling wrote a spoof military manual about Ninja invisibility powers which purported to be the work of Treholt; then, the Norwegian Film Institute gave him 10.5 million krone (roughly £1.2 million) to film an alternative history in which Treholt leads a group of Norwegian ninjas loyal to the late King Olaf and fighting for peace and justice. Treholt colludes with the Soviets only to combat a secret Western organisation which inflicts terror on its own people to justify all-out war against Russia; an idea which resonates with a number of conspiracy theories today.

The enlightened Treholt serves a higher cause, and shares pleasant flashes of Zen philosophy – "Every place and every moment is always the best; Every pine cone falls to its rightful place" – while his team of ninjas raise an affectionate smile and are vaguely reminiscent of Baron Munchhausen's equally motley band.

Norwegian Ninja is humorously faithful to every aspect of 1980s action cinema, employing beautifully old-fashioned effects in place of CGI: stop motion animation, exploding miniature models and tacky first-person views all contribute to a hugely enjoyable viewing experience. Another advantage of this retro style is being able to use analogue gadgets that the audience has not a hope in hell of understanding – the logic being that an iPod app that can hack Pentagon data, though useful, is not half as entertaining on screen as an exploding clockwork glider. The remote control quadrocopter is also very cool, as are the submarine motorbikes and the feng-shui-powered base defences.

It may seem daft to be giving this film such a rave review, but it really is a joy to watch – a funny, stylish comedy with an infectiously good-natured tone.

George Binning

Fortean Times Verdict
AN UNEXPECTED GEM FROM A FIRST-TIME FILM-MAKER **8**

Lexx: The Complete Series

Dir Colin Bucksey, Chris Bould, US 1997-2002

Mediumrare, £69.99

Appearing in the terrestrial TV cosmos in the late-1990s, *Lexx* went boldly where no man, disembodied robot, half-cluster-lizard / half-renegade-love-slave SF show had gone before; or since, for that matter. Think *Red Dwarf* crossed with *Flash Gordon* crossed with some popping candy FX and the matte equivalent of a bad hair day and that will give you a fairly good indication of what to expect.

There's 19 discs of it – and it's barking mad. The core cast is accompanied by the garish, the camp and the frankly brazen titillation provided by a parade of barely clad women, Eva Harbermann as Zev Bellringer, the aforementioned half-cluster-lizard / half-renegade-love-slave, for one. 790 is a disembodied robot who ends up getting the love slave programming meant for Zev. Stanley H Twaddle (Brian Downey) is the spineless, save-his-own-skin, Zachery Smith type who, by unlucky accident for the rest of the crew, happens to be the captain of the *Lexx*; while Michael McManus as Kai the undead Divine Assassin is pitted against the evil His Divine Shadow. You soon find yourself spiralling out of control, what with the cosmic plot dust for brains, infectious puerile innuendo, opportunistic female nudity, an enemy insect civilisation warring with mankind and a cannibal queen on the rampage; all done in the best possible taste, obviously.

Lexx launched with four feature-length episodes. "I Worship His Shadow" introduces the motley group as jailed renegades planning their escape by stealing the titular spacecraft, a gigantic dragonfly with its 'Ocular Parabola', against which the power of the Death Star shows all the force of a garden pea. Their escape goes horribly, wonderfully wrong (and right at the same time, really). "Supernova" has the cannibal queen Giggerota munching on His Divine Shadow's brains, and Tim Curry puts in an appearance as a poet-librarian, apparently wanting to breed with Stanley, while in "Gigashadow", Zev tries to find proto-blood for Kai, space pirates abound, the insect plot to destroy mankind is revealed and lots of cleavage defies gravity to save the day, mankind and the Universe. We then plunge into the deepest nooks and crannies of the spaced-out for a further three series.

Originally airing here on Channel 5, it wasn't until some of the wackier CBeebies creations got into their psychotropic stride in the Noughties that UK TV would be graced with comparable altered state madness.

Nick Čirkovič

Fortean Times Verdict

GET SUCKED INTO A BLACK HOLE OF CULT SCI-FI **6**

The Devil's Tomb

Dir Jason Connery, US 2009

Lion's Gate Home Entertainment, £12.99

With the involvement of Jason Connery and a cast featuring Cuba Gooding Jr, Ray Winstone, Ron Perlman and Henry Rollins, *The Devil's Tomb* is resolutely a *man*'s movie, with machismo positively dripping from the screen. An occult thriller with potential, it's almost ruined by the clichés and stereotypes embodied in 'the elite group of soldiers sent on a dangerous mission' plot. We have the 'commander-plagued-by-flashbacks', the ballsy doctor, the antisocial and morally ambivalent computer hacker and the (maybe) gay mercenary haunted by the ghost of her aborted daughter (in itself becoming quite a tired horror motif.)

As crack marines, they're surprisingly easily spooked, complaining about dead bodies and even barbed wire, and prone to asking "What is this bullshit?" a lot.

Like the real trooper he is, Cuba Gooding Jr acts the pants out of this tired script; his always mellifluous drawl a necessary counterpoint to the chaos and carnage enveloping his troops. After a fairly discouraging start, it drastically improves when the fallen angel of the title appears, with acolytes declaiming my new favourite after-dinner toast: "Together we will dine on the afterbirth of her new becoming." Cheers!

Tim Weinberg

Fortean Times Verdict

FORMULAIC, IF OCCASIONALLY FUN, OCCULT THRILLER **6**

SHORTS

LOST FUTURE

(Entertainment One, £15.99)

In the post-apocalyptic future, the remnants of humanity exist as two mutually antagonistic tribes. Some look like poundshop Orcs and choose to fly around on wires; the others all look like Colin Farrell and wear machine-stitched tunics. The papier-mâché boulder (as popularised by *Star Trek*) is their weapon of choice. If you can imagine a sci-fi collaboration involving both Germans and South Africans (it was made for the SyFY Channel), then perhaps this uber-camp meeting (visually at least) of *300* and *The Dukes of Hazzard* makes some sense. In its favour, the bizarre editing and dialogue lend it the perverse charm of a crap Kung Fu film and Sean Bean plays his usual trusty old war-horse; seen here at war… on a horse. **TW 4/10**

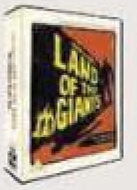
THE DOOR

(Optimum Home Entertainment, £15.99)

As a premise, Anno Saul's *The Door* is haunted by Nicholas Roeg's masterpiece *Don't Look Now*. Wealthy painter David Andernach (Mads Mikkelsen) is haunted by guilt and grief at the death of his daughter who drowns in a small pool in the garden while he is busy having sex down the road with a neighbour. Five years later, disowned by his wife and suicidal over his loss, David attempts to end it all as he returns to the very same pool. Instead, he is led through a portal to an alternative reality in which he sees a chance for redemption. Nothing, though, is as it seems. The trapped-between-worlds theme makes this part mystery thriller, part sci-fi, and the result is always watchable, if not quite offering the catharsis the original premise promises and that tragedy needs. **NČ 6/10**

LAND OF THE GIANTS

(Revelation Films, £39.99)



Though maybe better remembered for his kitsch sc-ifi series *Lost In Space*, Irwin Allen was also responsible for one of the more intriguing series of the late 1960s – *Land of the Giants*. When a sub-orbital spaceship heading from LA to London crosses a mysterious space storm, crew and passengers are transported onto a parallel Earth where everything is 12 times bigger. Remorselessly hunted down by the planet's inhabitants – a race of humanoid giants ruled by a totalitarian government – and preyed upon by wildlife which thinks of them as nothing more than tasty snacks, the crew of the *Spindrift* attempts in vain to somehow return to the home planet.

Through the use of creative camera work and elaborate, gargantuan props – radios, telephones, pencils – *Land of the Giants* achieved the sort of believability that eludes contemporary CGI effects. The series also, perhaps unconsciously, tapped into a certain Pop Art æsthetic, turning household items into iconic landmarks and thus creating a show remarkable not just for its exciting storytelling but for its bold and often memorable visuals. Although the full run of the show has been available in a clever 'wooden cage' box set in the States for a few years, this DVD marks the programme's first UK release and features the 26 episodes of the first season. Extras include an unaired full-length version of the pilot episode, interviews with Gary Conway and Don Marshall and other goodies. **EG 8/10**

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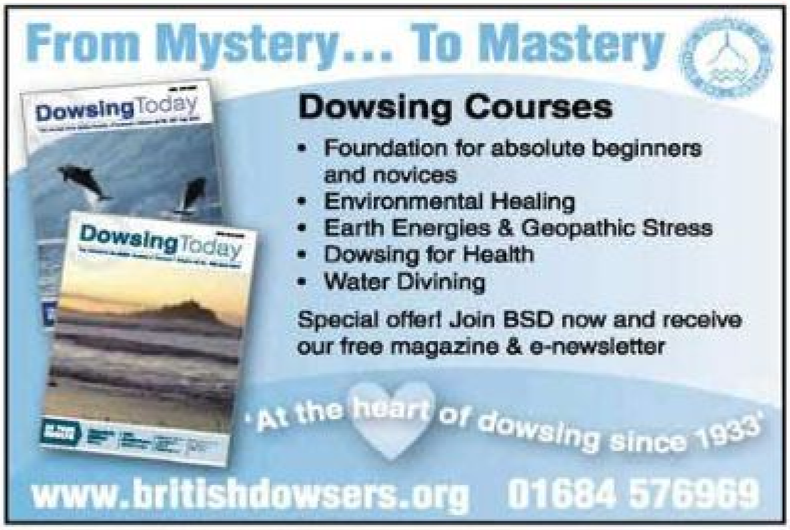
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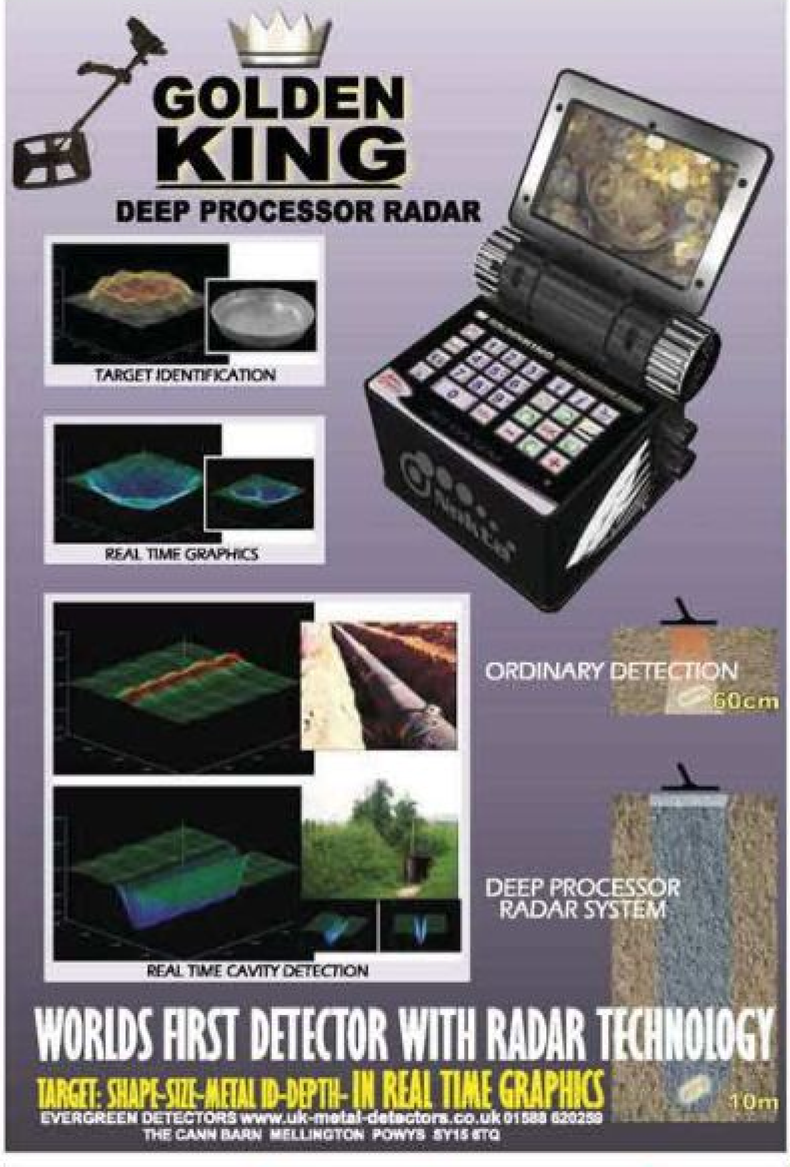
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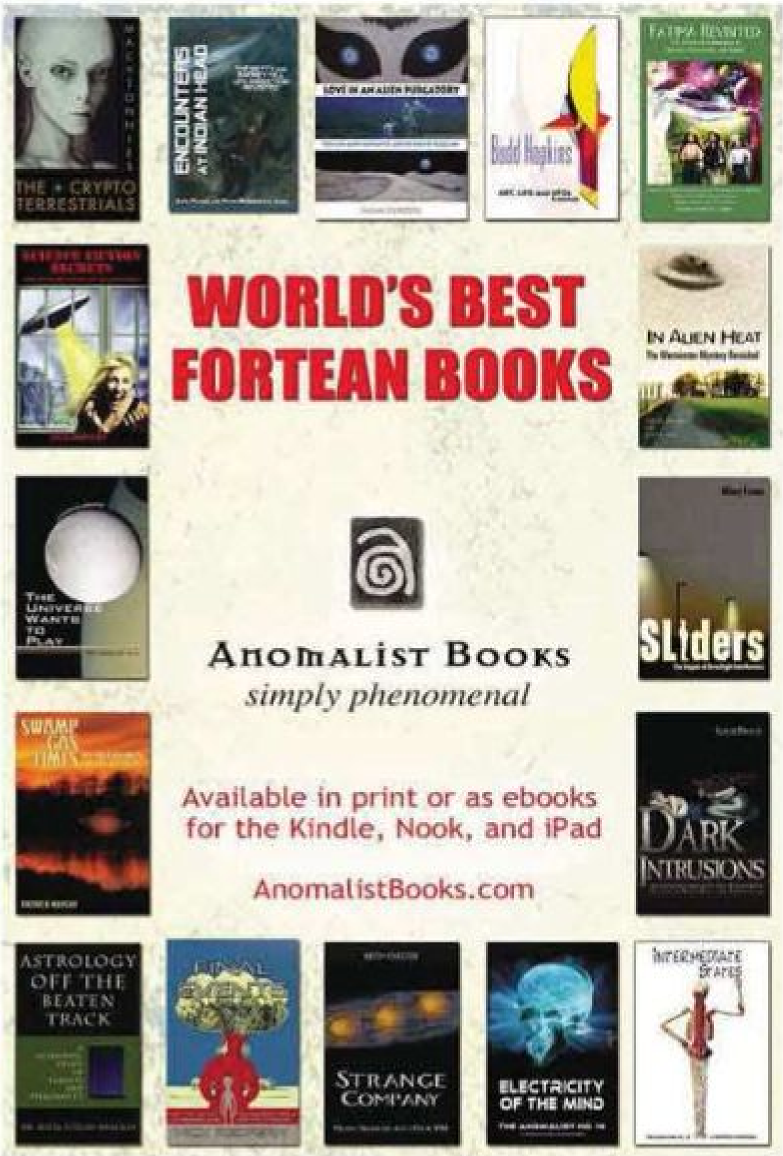
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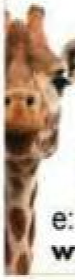

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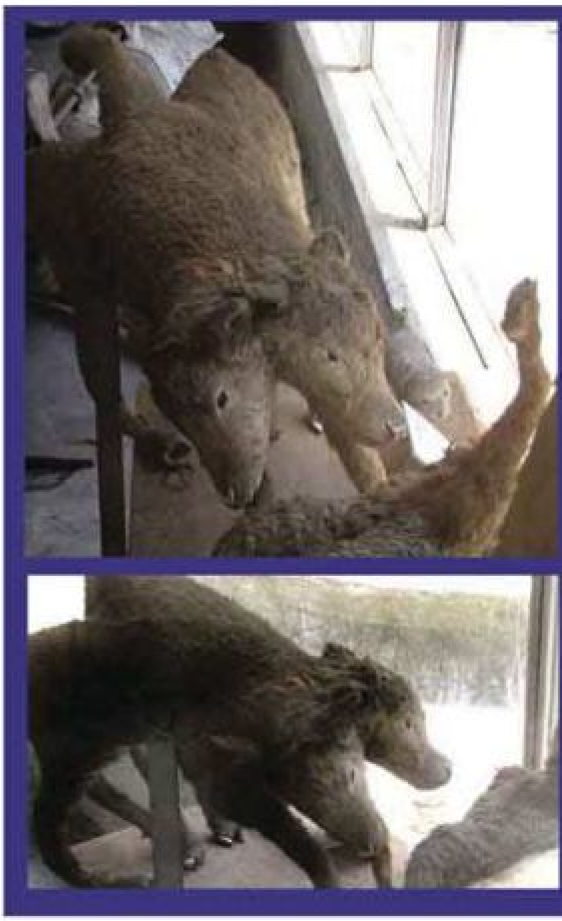


Georgian sheep

I discovered these two-headed sheep – probably also with an anomalous number of legs – in the storage area of the Ajara Khariton Akhvlediani State Museum, Batumi, Adjara Republic, Georgia on 26 June 2010. The two specimens were very hard to photograph due to the glare of reflected sunlight on the glass of the cabinet.

Marinus Anthony Van der Sluijs
New Malden, Surrey

Imaginary castle

I enjoyed the first part of the article on Otto Rahn, but it's interesting what a little background research turns up…
I was intrigued by the sentence "He made a point of visiting the remote castle of Germelshausen, where Christian Rosenkreutz was said to have been born." [**FT273:34**]

There is no castle of Germelshausen. The name is a fictitious one invented by Friedrich Gerstäcke in the 19th century in a story about a cursed village that vanishes and periodically reappears. The only real place of this name is a road running out of Dillstädt (which was supposed to have been Gerstäcke's model). The author Maurice Magre in his book *Magicians, Seers, and Mystics* claimed that Christian Rosenkreutz was the last descendant of a Germelshausen family which owned a castle standing in the Thuringian Forest, but this was after the name was invented by Gerstäcke, and no "Schloss Germelshausen" can be found in Thuringia.

The actual castle in question seems to be Wartburg castle, which is generally given as the birthplace of Rosenkreutz. But Wartburg has no connection with Germelshausen, and is better known for its associations with Elisabeth of Hungary, Martin Luther, and Wagner's Tannhäuser. It is hardly remote, being just outside Eisenach, and is a popular tourist destination (I have been there myself).

Roger Musson
By email

The "tag from Otto's body bag" [**FT274:44**] is actually the identification label for a portrait of Otto Rahn, done by painter Wilhelm Goetz from Homberg, supplied to the Head of the Art Exhibition Hesse-Nassau, for them to consider putting it in a museum. But then, most of the "facts" in this two-part hagiography of the Nazi writer are quite at odds with consensus reality or anything known by conventional historians about this era anyway.

Ulrich Magin
Leinfelden-Echterdingen, Germany

Pussy puzzle

I fund the pious feline legend about Mohammad's cat [**FT272:6**] most perplexing. If tabby cats today bear a letter 'M' marking because the Prophet had one for a pet, then why is the marking in the Roman alphabet instead of Arabic script? Similarly, if the Virgin Mary made the mark of her own initial out of gratitude after a tabby kept the baby Jesus warm in the manger, shouldn't the mark appear in Aramaic script?

Richard T Crowe
Oak Lawn, Illinois

Jerusalem sighting

'Jerusalem UFO hoax?' [UFO Files, **FT273:26**] has a few errors. It is Israel that "has a population of 7.5 million", not Jerusalem [see "Errata" **FT274:2**]. What is the 'foundation stone' to which the authors refer? The "holiest site in Judaism" is (either) the Western (Wailing) Wall, the last remaining section of the Herodian Temple on Temple Mount; or (for many Jews) the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron.

If the picture with the article is claimed to be taken from Mount Zion, the ground should rise to the left as the southern end of the Mount Moriah (Temple Mount) is lower than the north and Mount Zion is to the southwest of the Dome of the Rock. It looks to me as if this picture is from the lookout on Mount of Olives in East Jerusalem.

Strange lights indeed. As Israel is always on a war footing, police and military helicopters constantly patrol the skies over Jerusalem and, at night, are equipped with very powerful searchlights. Almost beside the Dome of the Rock on Temple Mount is the Al-aqsa mosque, which is kept under constant watch. There are hundreds of police, security and private CCT cameras throughout the city, so a UFO "descending to ground level" would be quickly seen (and probably shot down by the Israeli air force, as the Israeli have zero tolerance for 'UFOs").

Richard Seary
Queensland

Dogfish

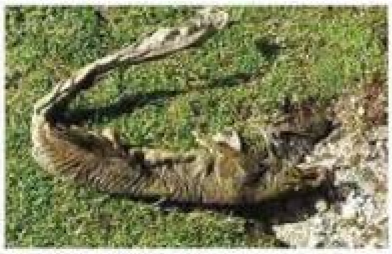
The creature on Tory Island in Yvonne Bolte's photograph [**FT273:73**] is a dried-up dogfish. I used to see plenty after fishing competitions along the beach I lived near on the Isle of Man. They never seemed to rot, just dry out and seabirds didn't seem overly keen on eating them either.

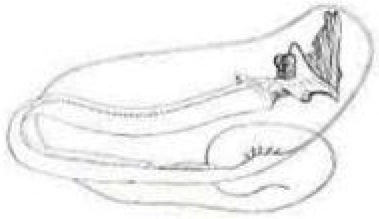
Kevin Adamson
By email

Editor's note: *David Burn, Ian B Dunne, Claire Gannon, Mike Long, Martyn Smith and Claire Thompson also thought it was a dogfish.*

With its strange, puckered, upturned mouth, tube-like protrusions and wing-shaped fins behind the head, I'd put good money on the "Tory Island critter" being a "Tube-Eye fish" (*Stylephorus chordatus*). The interesting thing is that the Tube Eye (bottom) is a very deep and little-known denizen of tropical seas, not the kind of thing you'd expect to find in County Donegal.

Martin Yates
Yorkhill, Glasgow





Ignoring UFOs

The SEP (Somebody Else's Problem) syndrome identified by Tony Sandy [**FT272:76**] is surely as remarkable as the anomalies it ignores. We might suspect "selective inattention", an unconscious defence mechanism known to psychologists, but this would fail to explain what sometimes looks like a thrall of unawareness cast upon potential witnesses by the anomalous source itself. Here are some examples from my own experience of other people's inability to register their experience.

On a clear August afternoon in 1968, two friends, Adam and Moira (not their real names), and I walked to Chanctonbury Ring on the South Downs. In the northeast hung a silver cylinder, shaped like a cigarette, wingless and windowless, horizontal, motionless, about 30ft (9m) long, and silent. Soon the object began to move, describing regular clockwise (from our viewpoint) circles while remaining horizontal. After six or seven circuits, it vanished on the spot, then suddenly reappeared towards the southeast, resuming its circumnavigations. It repeated this routine maybe five times – vanishing, reappearing, circling – until it disappeared for good in the northeast.

Nobody else was around and, because the performance had encircled us, I had the odd feeling that it might have been entirely for our benefit – or for the benefit of some of us: for at the outset, Adam had turned his back on the display and seated himself on a grassy hump to roll a cigarette (!), which he smoked with immense concentration while staring fixedly away into the middle distance. "Aren't you interested in this?" I asked. "Nah," he replied, "it's probably just some Air Force experiment." – "Even so, aren't you interested?" – "Nah." Six years later, Adam was diagnosed as a paranoid-schizophrenic, and in 1992 he took his own life. Moira and I remain in touch, and her recollection of events, though broadly confirmatory, is hazy.

On Brighton Pier one Saturday in September 1978, studying a magnificent sunset, I noticed a horizontal elliptical object that didn't move with the gently drifting clouds. It was about the size of an airliner, pale gold, self-luminous and silent, When dark clouds passed behind it, the object was thrown into sharp relief, but against bright clouds its body was less visible, though its clear outline remained. Of the dozen or so people around, nobody seemed to notice it. After much steady observation, I decided to share the experience with a group of four French girls – but, maybe thinking this was just a weird chat-up line, they backed away, nervously giggling, throwing fitful glances at the sky but registering nothing. I approached a man in his 50s and carefully pointed out the object, which was now clearly visible against dark cloud. He seemed to gaze at it directly for a few seconds, then turned to me and said, with thunderous impassivity, "Yes, it's a lovely evening, isn't it?" and sidled away to safer territory. (Of all my six experiences of what I consider to have been *bona fide* UFO sightings, this is the only one not shared with other witnesses.)

Sometime in 1966, an aunt casually mentioned that while viewing a property with an estate agent in Horsham the previous week, she had seen "something peculiar" in the sky, then went on to describe a visit to the vet with her dog. Prising details out of this indifferent and recalcitrant witness was like the proverbial pulling of teeth, but it finally transpired that she had undergone a UFO sighting to die for. Her attention had been caught by what seemed to be a mass of goldfish in a pond, but which turned out to be the reflection of "a huge golden thing like a bowl, as big as a double-decker bus", suspended overhead at rooftop height for about 10 seconds before "shooting off at a terrific speed". "It must have been some new-fangled kind of aeroplane," she opined blankly, and got straight back to canine matters. When, years later, I questioned her about it, she remembered nothing.

Harman Dickson
Littleover, Derby

UFOs and weapon sites

This is a response to Robert Hasting's letter contesting my critique of the "evidence" presented at his UFOs and Nukes press conference last September [**FT274:74**]. Firstly, with reference to Col Halt's claims about UFOs firing beams at the Weapons Storage Area during the RAF Woodbridge incident of 1980, Robert appears to have completely missed the point. Regardless of whether Halt first revealed this information 10, 20 or 30 years after the events, the most important fact is that he failed to mention this alleged threat to a nuclear-armed NATO base in his official report written for the attention of Britain's MoD, written on 13 January 1981, two weeks afterwards. That he omitted any mention of this alleged incursion either to his immediate boss (Conrad) or their hosts (MoD) who provided air defence for the USAF base in his official report made soon after the events is damning. Halt does not need me to discredit his testimony when he has done that himself by his own actions and by the continual embellishment of his testimony. As for Col Conrad's testimony, Robert appears to feel that because "Conrad failed to show up at my press conference and publicly challenge [Halt's] testimony" that somehow proves his argument. Another view is that Conrad didn't show up because he has nothing more to say about a minor incident that he feels has been the subject of unwarranted embellishment and media hype. Halt would do well to follow his example.

As for the Malmstrom story of 1967, Robert's faith in the credibility of testimony from military witnesses who come forward to describe events that happened decades ago is not borne out by the lessons provided by numerous past examples – such as those who claim to have been present at the mythical Roswell incident [**FT227:27**]. Despite the hype, Hastings has yet to produce a single account from anyone who actually says they saw a UFO at the missile silos at the relevant time. Second- and third-hand stories recalled decades later are no substitute for first-hand testimony supported by contemporary documents. They are not "evidence" that would stand up to the most basic questioning in a courtroom. The fact that UFOs are frequently seen near military bases, including some that host nuclear weapons, is hardly surprising.

The Condign study by the British Defence Intelligence Staff, published in 2000 [**FT211:4–6**] examined media stories that suggested UFOs were targeting UK military and nuclear sites and found "no evidence whatsoever" to support the claim. The study found that UFOs spotted or reported in the vicinity of military bases were simply an artefact of the incessant 24-hour visual and radar watch that is kept as part of the normal role of such stations. And in any case, most UFOs – including those observed by military observers – are found on investigation to be quite ordinary natural and man-made phenomena. Even "credible witnesses" such as RAF pilots have been fooled by phenomena such as space debris (see for example the case of the RAF Tornado pilots described in **FT209:29**). If there were any truth in Robert's assertion that aliens are coming to Earth to warn us about our nuclear experiments, then where were they in March this year when the tsunami hit northeast Japan, leading to the leak of nuclear material from the Fukushima reactor? If they were here to warn us about our nuclear hazards, then they have singularly failed in their mission.

David Clarke
By email

A 20-year cycle?

As Nick Parkins's Forum article [**FT270:52–53**] pointed out, the somewhat apocryphal Curse of Tecumseh, in which the Shawnee chief declared that any 'Great Chief' (or President of the USA) elected in a year ending with a zero would die in office, claimed seven victims before Ronald Reagan dodged a bullet with his name on it. As for George W Bush, he too didn't die in office although, ironically, he probably had more potentially murderous enemies than any of his predecessors. There was a fairly serious attempt on his life in 2005 during a visit to Georgia, when a man threw a live hand grenade in his direction, but it failed to go off. This was, incidentally, the 15th known near-death experience of a US president.

Does Bush's survival mean that the 20-year death cycle has come to an end? Or was it no more than a statistical artefact in the first place, as most of us probably believe?

One man who has his reservations is psychologist Stanley Krippner. A few years after the Kennedy assassination, he gave a talk to the New York-based Society for the Investigation of Recurring Events in which he explained that there could be genuinely cyclical forces at work. Power in the USA, he said, was represented by one man (so far) to a much greater extent than in many other countries, the country's economic strength making him probably the most powerful figure in the world.[1]

Krippner speculated that feelings of resentment against an archetypal father figure could reach a peak every 20 years or so, the death (by whatever means) of the chief executive serving to provide a release for the hostility of future would-be assassins. "As a result, they may not centre their hate upon another father-image-authority figure for approximately two decades," he concluded, admitting that his theory was highly speculative.

However, it would have made more sense in the 1960s than it does today. Then, according to the Fisher Exact Probability test, there was only one chance in 25,000 that the first seven zero-year deaths were due to chance alone. It now seems more likely that this was indeed what they were due to, and that whoever becomes Great Chief in 2020 stands a good chance of serving a full term unscathed.

Note

[1] A version of the talk appeared in the *International Journal of Parapsychology*, Sept. 1967.

Guy Lyon Playfair
London

Party levitation

Party levitation [**FT271:17, 275:68**] is also known as "Light as a feather, stiff as a board." How far does this go back? By chance I came across a mention in *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*. 31 July 1665: Part of the entry reads:

"He saw four little girles, very young ones, all kneeling, each of them, upon one knee; and one begun the first line, whispering in the eare of the next, and the second to the third, and the third to the fourth, and she to the first. Then the first begun the second line, and so round quite through, and, putting each one finger only to a boy that lay flat upon his back on the ground, as if he was dead; at the end of the words, they did with their four fingers raise this boy as high as they could reach, and he [Mr Brisband] being there, and wondering at it, as also being afeard to see it, for they would have had him to have bore a part in saying the words, in the roome of one of the little girles that was so young that they could hardly make her learn to repeat the words, did, for feare there might be some sleight used in it by the boy, or that the boy might be light, call the cook of the house, a very lusty fellow, as Sir G. Carteret's cook, who is very big, and they did raise him in just the same manner." [See http://bit.ly/hdc3Xh (pepys.info).

John Pilge
By email

Regarding "Party Levitation": in addition to Nandor Fodor's *Between Two Worlds*, you may want to check the lower half of page 60 of the February 1922 issue of *Popular Science*. The lifting part of the lifting game can be explained, but the other bit as depicted on page 60 is, while it too could probably be explained in non-paranormal terms, is… interesting. And it includes photos. The scientist involved in the experiment, by the way, is no relation.

Kevin Alan McDougall
Victoria, British Columbia

Dangerous crossing

It's nice once in a while to read an article about my country of origin, so thank you to John Billingsley ("Dangerous crossing" **FT271:56–57**). There may be some things I can add. Even if someone has lived in a country for a long time, there are some cultural things that cannot be translated properly. I inherently know some of these Japanese quirks, because I spent part of my childhood there, my family exclusively talked to me in Japanese, and my older relatives are/were fairly religious in the local Shinto and Zen Buddhist ways. But then again, the difference in the author's and my understanding could be due to geography. My mother's family has lived in and around Tokyo since before the start of the Edo era, and I grew up with the dialects and customs that may be thought wrong or foreign to a Kansai (Osaka, Kyoto area) person.

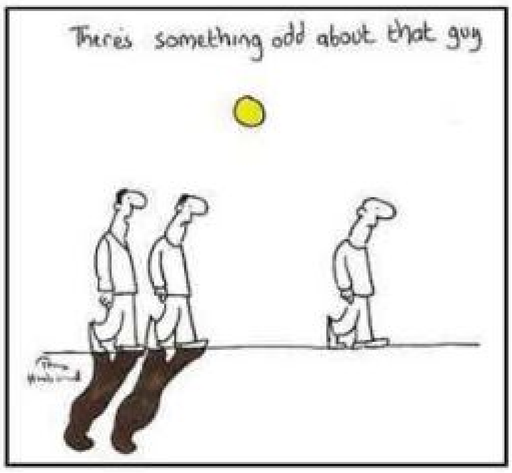
In the lyrics of the song, "iki ha yoi, yoi, kaeri ha kowai" (written 'ha', pronounced 'wa'), the author has written "kowai" as meaning "fearful". According to the Japanese wikipedia page on the song, that is a common misinterpretation, but should mean "tired" as in some of the Kanto (Tokyo and surrounding area) dialects. I remember my maternal grandma, who is from the Saitama, Ibaraki and Chiba border area where the song is supposed to have originated, telling me a similar thing.

According to our Kanto traditions, the rite of passage that is Shichi-go-san should be as follows: girls at three years old, boys at five, and then both at seven. But again, this could be a fairly modern and geographically different interpretation. The old Japanese people also counted years beginning from the moment of conception. So in this sense a seven-year-old child would be a child turning six that year in our modern-day calculation. In any case, the rite is still practised for children turning three, five and seven that year to avoid confusion, and because those numbers are considered auspicious.

The lyrics are so ambiguous that they are open to many interpretations. The most common one was about registering a child either at a shrine or at the local government outpost (sekisho). Another claims it could be the rigorous Sankin-koutai (the to and fro from home county to Edo post each year of the ruling lord, a plan by the Shogunate to keep the rural lords poor and unable to revolt). Both of the two above would explain "kowai" as meaning "tired". There were some online views expressed that the song was about a man going back home after being entertained in the red light districts. So "kowai" would mean "fearful" of getting a sexually transmitted disease. Still others claim the song, like "Kagome, Kagome", is about child abuse. When food was scarce and famine imminent, it was not unknown for parents to smother/drown their child/children, or sell them as slaves.

Regarding the change in tune of traffic lights, the local council told my father that the birdcalls (sparrows for north/south, cuckoos for east/west) made it easier for blind people to distinguish the directions. A lot has changed since my childhood in the 1980s and 1990s, but I'm glad to say some customs, such as the 5pm announcement and music (to tell children under 12 that it's time to be back at home), haven't changed.

Yuka Young
By email


There's something odd about that guy

TONY HUSBAND

it happened to me...

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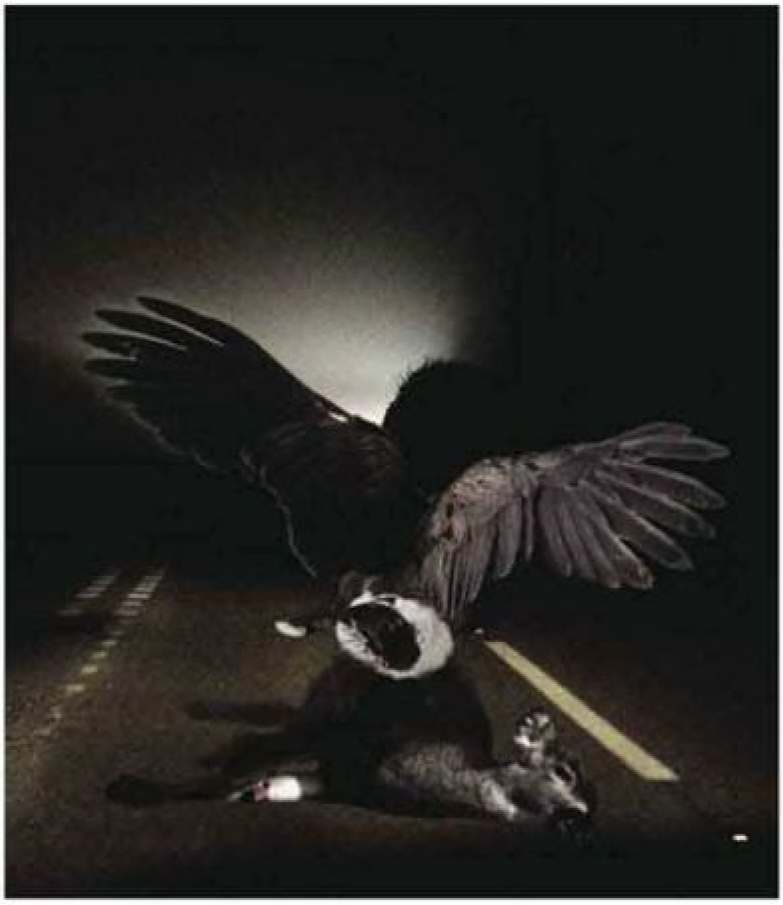
Giant bird

Just before sunrise on a summer morning in 1990 (give or take a year), I was driving south on Highway 21 in South Carolina with my wife and a friend, on our way to Hunting Island State Park for a camping excursion. Our routine was to stay up until the early morning hours, then load up and head out. I would drive while they slept, and when we arrived at our destination I would sleep while they set up camp. We were travelling at about 55–60mph (80–97km/h) when, after rounding a slight curve, four miles (6km) north-north-west of the intersection with I-95I, near the Combahee River, I noticed something in my lane up ahead. It was just before sunrise – light enough to see, but not yet broad daylight.

At first I thought it might be a dog or deer, but as I drove closer I noticed it was too tall to be either. I then took it to be a person and slowed down, but I soon noticed that it was nothing like a person. At this moment it looked up and straight at me. It was a great bird, dark brown to charcoal grey in colour, with yellow eyes and a very large yellow beak. It was very much like a Golden Eagle except for its tremendous size – between 6ft and 7ft (1.8–2m) tall. Its wingspan was wider than the highway lane, and about 60 to 70 per cent of the overall width of the entire road: I would say about 16ft–18ft (4.9–5.5m). The wings themselves appeared to be about 4–5ft (1.2–1.5m) from leading edge to trailing edge, but this was more difficult to gauge. Its feet were about three times as large as my hands and easily visible.

I was astonished but also fearful. I felt much like a swimmer who had just spotted a very large shark. As soon as the bird looked up, it turned around 180 degrees in a hopping motion and I noticed it was standing on a deer. I grabbed my fellow occupants in the vehicle and starting shaking them and screaming for them to wake up, while slowing to avoid striking the animal with my truck. In another very odd-looking hopping motion and a pump of its wings, it lifted the young deer from the roadway in a rocking motion. I could actually see the wind created from the motion of its wings affecting the surrounding grass and bushes on the side of the road, on an otherwise perfectly still morning. With two more beats of its wings it completely cleared the treetops in this mature growth forest. These were very large oak trees for the most part. Obviously I was very excited to see this tremendous creature, and was frustrated that the others didn't awake in time to see it. The entire encounter probably only lasted 15–20 seconds.



ETIENNE GILFILLAN

It was a great bird, dark brown to charcoal grey with yellow eyes and beak

When the bird left my field of view, it was travelling north-east. I would estimate that the deer weighed about 50lb (23kg). It was a young deer that still had a few very faint hints of fawn spots on its side, only visible as the deer "flexed" when lifted from the road. I felt the bird had killed the deer, possibly hunting from a very large oak limb that stretched out over the highway that I noticed on a later trip, but I have no way of knowing for sure. I could clearly see the deer's neck was broken, and its tongue hanging from its mouth, dribbling saliva. I have spent most of my life hunting, fishing and camping in South Carolina. I have seen many deer in all manner of conditions. This really looked like a very fresh kill. Vehicle strike was possible but unlikely, due to an almost total absence of any people in this remote area, much less anyone in a vehicle.

I will sign a sworn affidavit, take any test including a polygraph, and swear on the Bible in a court of law that this statement is 100 per cent true and the information in this account is as close to absolute accuracy as humanly possible. I saw what I saw.

Mike Richards
West Columbia, South Carolina

Electric sabotage

In reading the article on SLI (street light interference) [**FT273:52–55**] and the subsequent online discussion forum, I couldn't help but notice the marked similarities of people's experiences, especially from early childhood. I was born and raised in the US. Back in the days of 'rabbit ear' TVs and antennæ-based radios, it was a running joke in my family that I would jinx the tuning just by walking into a room. I also had a terrible time with analogue watches, 'killing' them or making them run too fast or slow; any type of battery seemed to 'die' quickly after I handled it. But the more interesting thing was this: many of the people on the forum described an event where they had been electrocuted in some way. As a teenager, I myself had this experience, reaching up into a hanging light to change a bulb (with wet hair up in a towel!) and connecting with a live socket. Thankfully the resultant shock only threw me to the floor uninjured. Let me tell you, it's a feeling you never forget! It makes me wonder whether I would have become a SLIder without that event.

I don't recall the SLI phenomenon until much later in my life – maybe 30s or 40s? That is certainly when I had the most stress and upset going on. I had also worked for years in TV, cable television and radio, always in rooms full of electrics, and also this was when my stress levels were perhaps highest. At any rate, to this day I sometimes 'forget' about the SLI; I'm not out at night much anymore so when it happens I'm still surprised. My husband is a reliable witness and has been very supportive. One other thing is this – when I was most aware of it (during the stressful times, and thinking I was going mad) – I could almost feel it before it happened. Once, on a particularly bad day a few years before moving to the UK, I swear I put out the lights on an entire stretch of freeway. I remember thinking: "Oh my God, what have I done?"

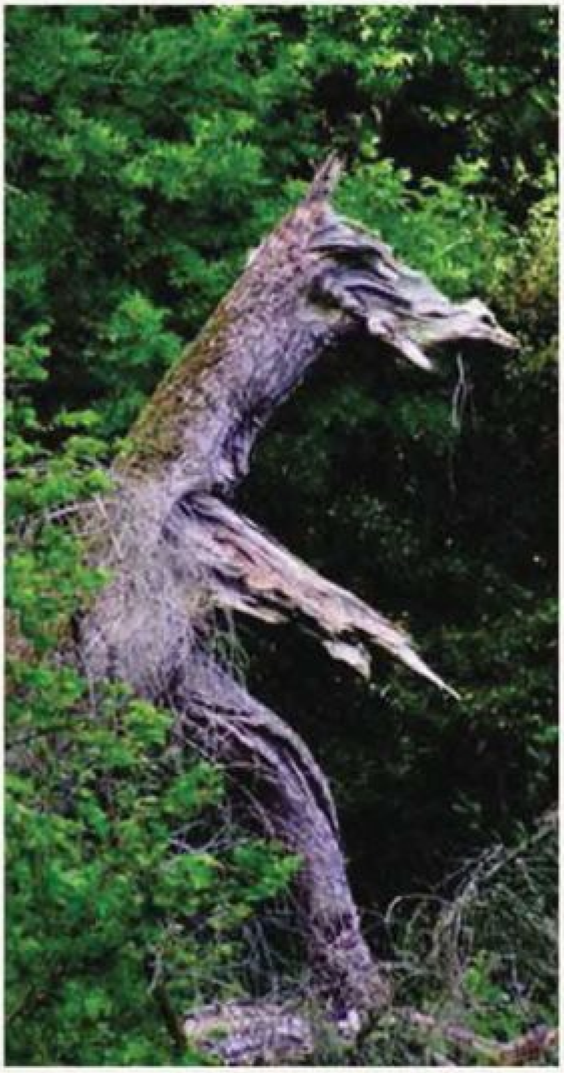
Recently, we visited a home/business we were evaluating, and while standing in the kitchen of the house the phone started beeping on its own. The woman couldn't work out what the problem was. My husband calmly said "Oh, it's probably my wife – things like that happen around her all the time." I stepped back a few feet and it stopped on its own. Ah well… I have been a bit stressed out lately. Thank you for publishing the feature on SLI and for leading me to a support group!

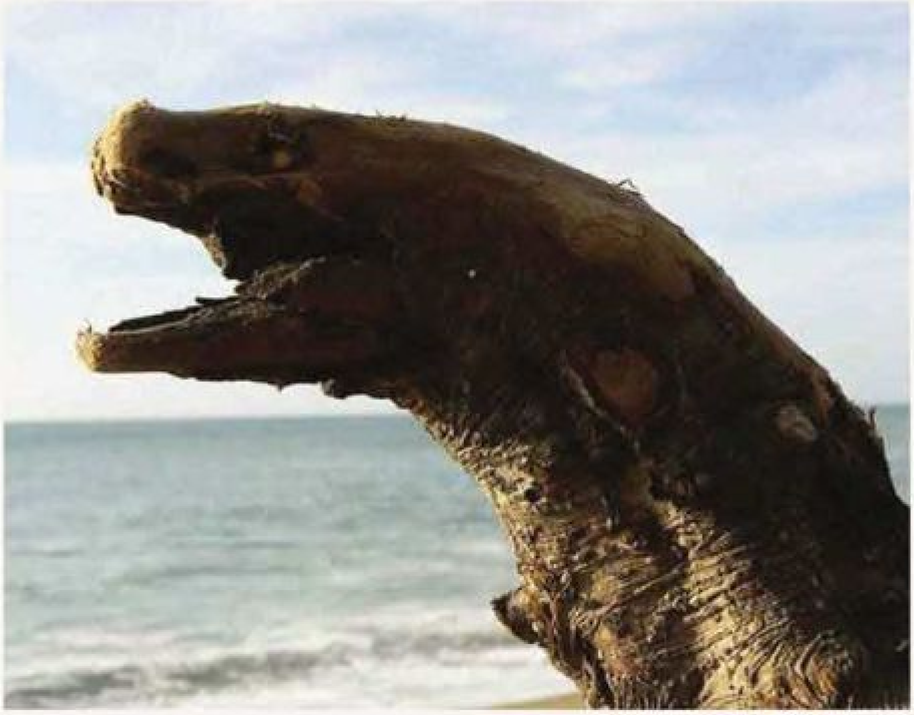
Sharon Dolan-Powers
Dunscore, Dumfries & Galloway

simulacra corner

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 2409 or to sieveking@forteantimes.com. If your photo is published, we'll send you an exclusive *Fortean Times* gift.

A selection of monstrous figures sent in by FT's observant readers.



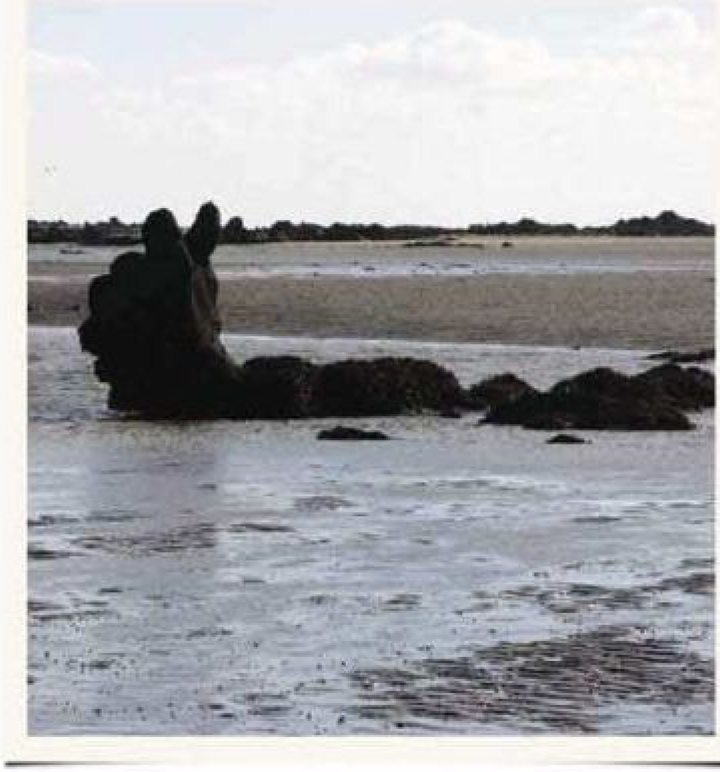


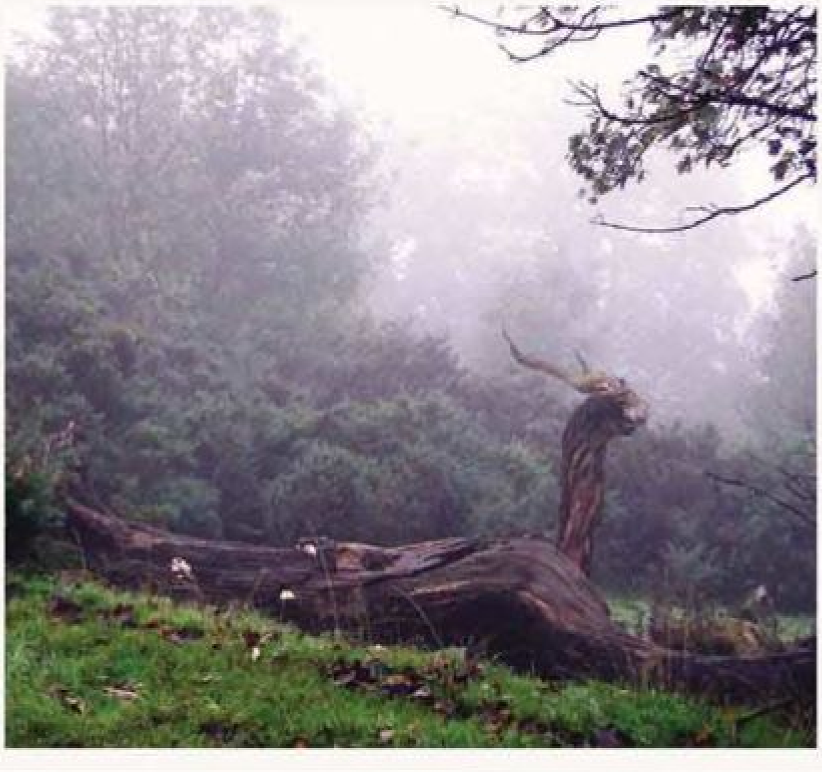
LEFT: On a recent holiday on the Isle of Arran in the Firth of Clyde, Scotland, Kevin McCallum and his family came across this monster formed by a fallen tree.

ABOVE: This photo of a "sea monster" was taken by Russell Murray on Block Island, off Rhode Island, and was sent in by his friend, Philip Helmers.

BELOW LEFT: Paul Chambers came upon this rock on a remote stretch of Jersey's southeast coast. At the time it reminded him of the Loch Ness Monster… but having studied the image he thought it looked more like a rabbit.

BELOW RIGHT: Tim Allen saw this Welsh "wood-dragon" while out walking in Brecon.





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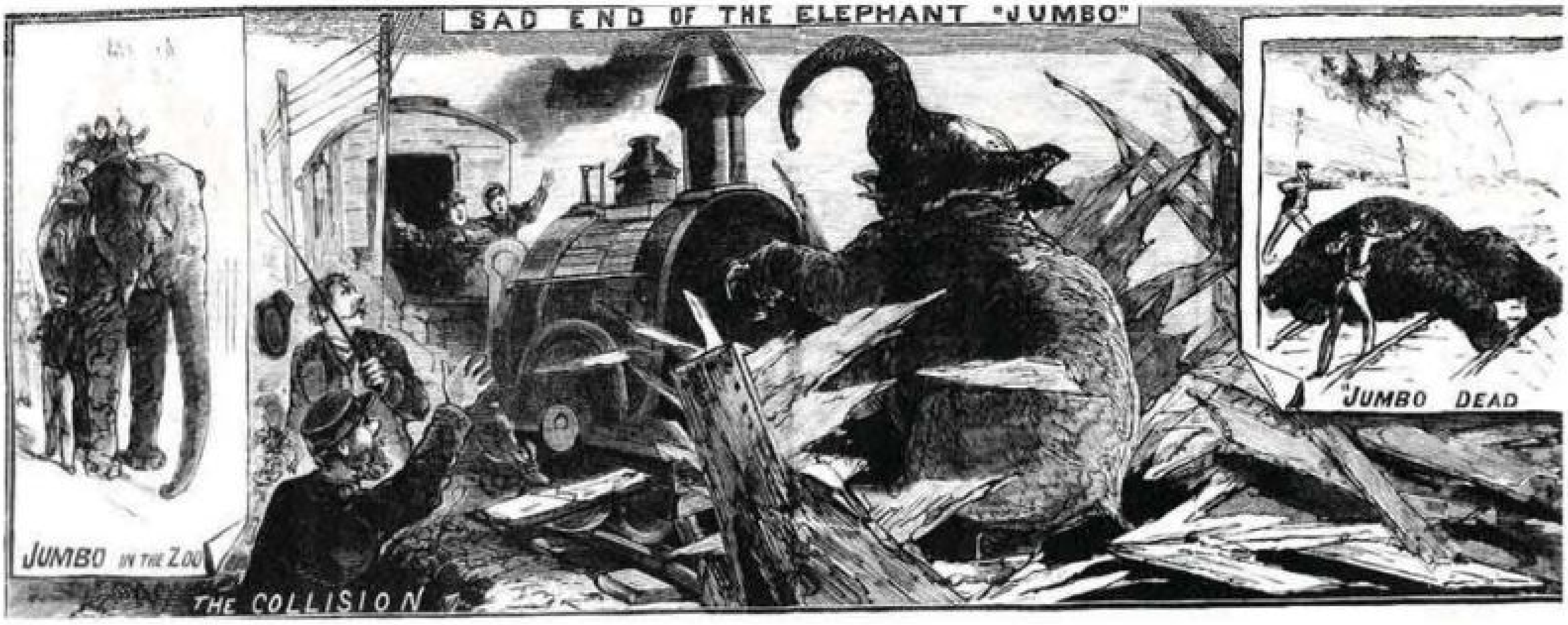


ABOVE: Jumbo's singular death pictured in *IPN* of 26 Sept 1889. **BELOW:** The stuffed Jumbo exhibited, and some other, more lively performers; from the *IPN*, 16 Nov 1889.

4. ALAS, POOR JUMBO

Jumbo, Europe's largest elephant, was the pride of London Zoo. In 1882, the American showman PT Barnum offered to purchase Jumbo for $10,000, and the Zoological Society of London accepted his offer. But since Jumbo was excessively popular, there was widespread fury at this "outrageous sale of a national character". From Queen Victoria down to the lowest guttersnipe, the nation was up in arms against the vulgar Barnum and his henchmen, who were taking poor Jumbo away from his friends in London. But the American would not budge: Jumbo was loaded into a crate and shipped to America on a steamer. The *Illustrated Police News* commented that "The singular outburst of affection and regard towards him shown so unmistakably and so tenderly by the great mass of the public has had no parallel in the case of any other animal."

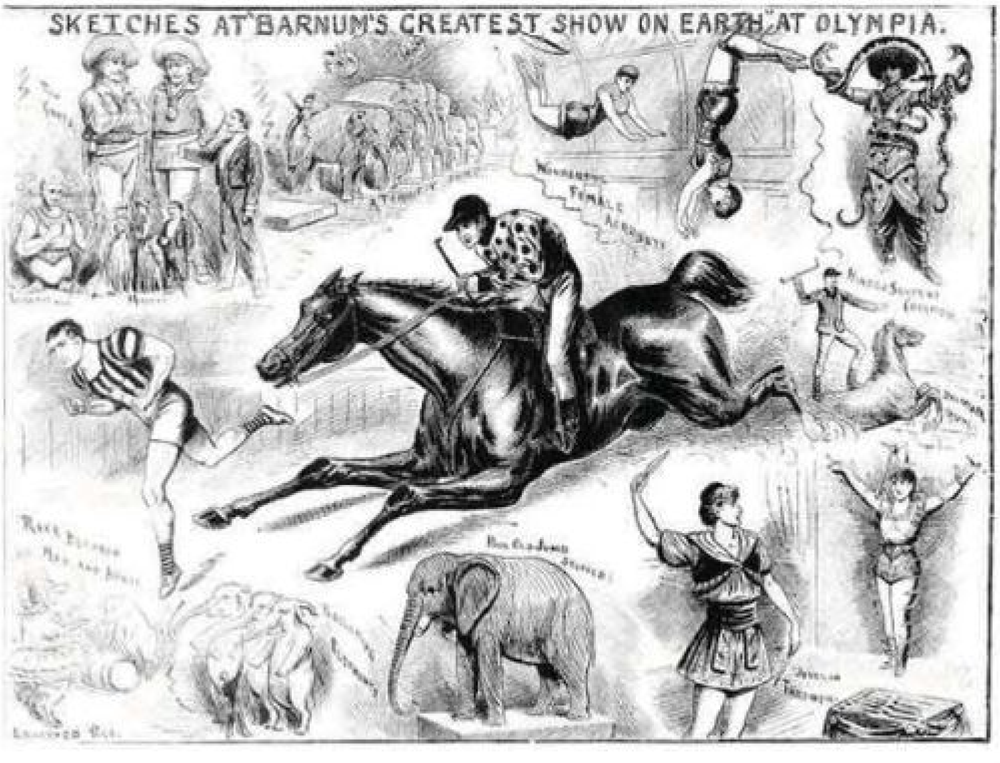
As the *IPN* had predicted, Jumbo became a nice earner for Barnum; within two weeks, he had paid back the cost of purchasing him and transporting him to America. At Barnum's circus, Jumbo took precedence over all other performers, whether two- or four-legged. Just as in Britain, the huge elephant became a media celebrity, and was probably the most famous animal of his time.

In September 1885, Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth was visiting St Thomas, Ontario. As the old keeper Matthew Scott was leading Jumbo and another elephant along what he believed to be a disused railway track, a train rapidly approached. Jumbo was hit hard from behind and expired within minutes. His death was headline news all over the world, like that of a celebrated monarch or statesman.

Fittingly, there were several rumours about Jumbo's strange death. One said that Jumbo had drunk too much beer and whisky on the evening in question and charged the locomotive head on in a drunken rage. Another rumour stated that Barnum had ordered that Jumbo be assassinated, since the elephant's tremendous flatulence had 'stunk up' the entire circus, and that the train had hit Jumbo's corpse just after the keeper had fired the lethal shot. Both these versions are entirely false, however; eyewitness testimony, as well as the documentation of the injuries on Jumbo's skeleton, indicate that the famous elephant was struck from behind. Thus the dramatic *IPN* drawing is quite erroneous, just like another one, from an American paper, reproduced in my recent book *Animal Freaks*.

PT Barnum was very much aggrieved at the untimely death of his star performer. With typical business-mindedness, he made the best of the situation, ordering Jumbo's skeleton to be mounted and his hide stuffed by an expert taxidermist. Both versions of Jumbo were brought along when Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth came to London in 1889. The many children who had prayed that Jumbo would soon be restored to his London friends must have been appalled that their prayers had come true in such a dismal manner; the poor elephant had been returned to them, dead but in duplicate!

The stuffed Jumbo was later given to Tufts University, where it was destroyed by fire in 1975; the skeleton is still at the American Museum of Natural History in New York.


SKETCHES AT BARNUM'S GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH AT OLYMPIA.

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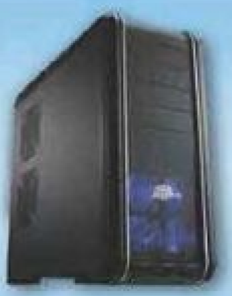

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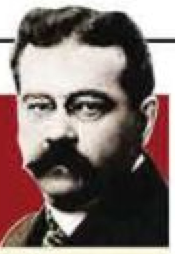
Why Fortean?



Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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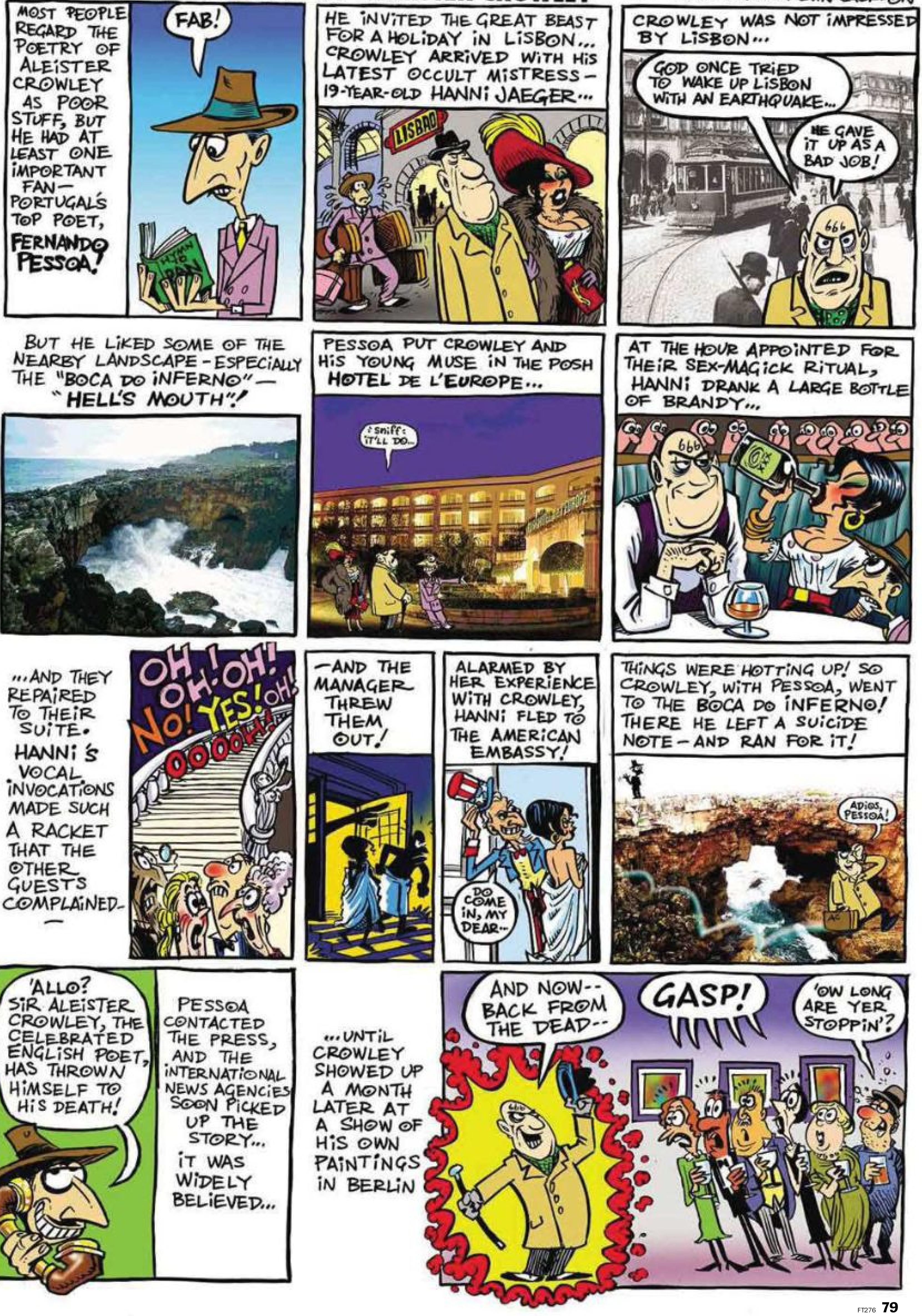
PHENOMENOMIX

Another incident from the life of ALEISTER CROWLEY

HUNT EMERSON and KEVIN JACKSON


MOST PEOPLE REGARD THE POETRY OF ALEISTER CROWLEY AS POOR STUFF, BUT HE HAD AT LEAST ONE IMPORTANT FAN—PORTUGAL'S TOP POET, FERNANDO PESSOA!
FAB!
HYMN TO PAN
HE INVITED THE GREAT BEAST FOR A HOLIDAY IN LISBON... CROWLEY ARRIVED WITH HIS LATEST OCCULT MISTRESS—19-YEAR-OLD HANNI JAEGER...
LISBOA
CROWLEY WAS NOT IMPRESSED BY LISBON...
GOD ONCE TRIED TO WAKE UP LISBON WITH AN EARTHQUAKE...
HE GAVE IT UP AS A BAD JOB!
666
BUT HE LIKED SOME OF THE NEARBY LANDSCAPE—ESPECIALLY THE "BOCA DO INFERNO"—"HELL'S MOUTH"!
PESSOA PUT CROWLEY AND HIS YOUNG MUSE IN THE POSH HOTEL DE L'EUROPE...
:SNIFF: IT'LL DO...
AT THE HOUR APPOINTED FOR THEIR SEX-MAGICK RITUAL, HANNI DRANK A LARGE BOTTLE OF BRANDY...
666
...AND THEY REPAIRED TO THEIR SUITE. HANNI'S VOCAL INVOCATIONS MADE SUCH A RACKET THAT THE OTHER GUESTS COMPLAINED—
OH! OH! OH! OH!
NO! YES! OH!
OOOOH!
—AND THE MANAGER THREW THEM OUT!
ALARMED BY HER EXPERIENCE WITH CROWLEY, HANNI FLED TO THE AMERICAN EMBASSY!
DO COME IN, MY DEAR...
THINGS WERE HOTTING UP! SO CROWLEY, WITH PESSOA, WENT TO THE BOCA DO INFERNO! THERE HE LEFT A SUICIDE NOTE—AND RAN FOR IT!
ADIOS, PESSOA!
'ALLO? SIR ALEISTER CROWLEY, THE CELEBRATED ENGLISH POET, HAS THROWN HIMSELF TO HIS DEATH!
PESSOA CONTACTED THE PRESS, AND THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS AGENCIES SOON PICKED UP THE STORY... IT WAS WIDELY BELIEVED...
...UNTIL CROWLEY SHOWED UP A MONTH LATER AT A SHOW OF HIS OWN PAINTINGS IN BERLIN
AND NOW-- BACK FROM THE DEAD--
GASP!
'OW LONG ARE YER STOPPIN'?

COMING NEXT MONTH

WE ARE NOT ALONE

THE REAL ALIEN INVASION

THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL

GALILEO AND THE OCCULT

+

WESTMINSTER ABBEY'S COSMATI PAVEMENT,
ABC X-FILES,
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AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES
277
ON SALE 23 JUNE

HUGO PIETTE

TALES FROM THE VAULT

EACH MONTH WE SEND *FORTEAN TIMES* FOUNDER BOB RICKARD DOWN INTO THE DARKEST, COBWEB-RIDDEN DEPTHS OF THE VAULTS OF FORTEAN TOWERS IN SEARCH OF STORIES FROM *FT*'S PAST.

JUNE 1981

A 90-year-old Yugoslavian war veteran coughed up a bullet that had been lodged in his lungs for 65 years. Ilija Sesum was wounded in the chest during World War I in 1916, at a battle on the Italian-Austrian border. During a recent illness, he allegedly coughed for several hours before dislodging the embedded bullet. Such stories were a staple of periodicals 100 years ago but now seem quite rare. **FT38:23**

This month saw two cases of imprisoned relatives, sadly typical of many others. Vivelinda Rodrigues, 48, and her two daughters, aged seven and eight, were discovered locked in a farm shed in Alhos Vedros, near Lisbon, and released. They were the result of a secret love affair with Portuguese businessman Antonio Verissimo, who kept them in the shed for more than seven years. Rodrigues was hospitalised for "severe nervous disorders" and her girls – who could not walk properly and knew only a few words – were sent to live with nuns. In Britain, the NSPCC reported a case of a young mother who locked in her three children at home for two years for fear they would be killed or injured in a road accident. **FT37:55**

JUNE 1991

After a decade of credulous rumours about the satanic nature of the trademark employed by consumer goods giant Procter and Gamble since 1882, the firm redesigned the logo. According to fundamentalists, the controversial man-in-the-moon design – with 13 stars and a curly beard and hair which formed demonic horns and the number 666 – mocked a biblical passage about "a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars". P&G said that between 1981 and 1985 they had received at least 100,000 queries about the intention of the design, but denied any links with Satanism. The 13 stars, they said, simply reflected the number of states when the logo was adopted. (In 2007, P&G successfully prosecuted Amway employees for promulgating the conspiracy theory in internal voice-mails back in 1995). **FT59:17**

At this time, the Frelimo government of Mozambique was struggling against South African-backed Renamo rebels. Significant victories over the Renamo were being won by poorly armed ragged gangs formed by a new cult called Barama (also N'prama and Naprama), founded in 1989. Their young prophet, Manuel Antonio, claimed to have risen again after dying from measles. He slept in graveyards and claimed that powerful spirits, including Jesus, were advising him. Antonio 'vaccinated' (*n'prama*) his followers *en masse*; they wore winding sheets as he called them from a mock burial and struck them with a machete. Those with no mark were declared inoculated against bullets and enjoined to fight only with a spear. Those killed during battle were said to have lost their immunity by breaking the cult's taboos, which forbade sex and food before battle, and flinching before gunfire. **FT59:22**

JUNE 2001

In mid-month, an 11-year-old boy was rescued from the sea near the port of Talcahuano, southern Chile, as he tried to evade the policewoman chasing him. Alex Rivas had been living with a pack of around 15 stray dogs, scavenging from dustbins and drinking milk from bitches with litters. He was well known to locals, who called him 'Dog Boy'; some suggested he had been with the dogs for more than two years. He was described as extremely violent, malnourished, hyperactive and inarticulate. He also had rotten and broken teeth, a scarred cheek and suffered from hypothermia. The boy was abandoned by his 16-year-old mother (at the age of five months or five years, reports differ) and with a thoroughly disrupted life ended up in a children's home near Concepcion in 1998. He ran away frequently and was about to be transferred to a psychiatric unit in Santiago when he escaped to live with the dogs. **FT150:9**

As a fan of the 'tree octopus' mythos, I was drawn to reports of a freshwater squid in a Serbian swamp. The Carska Bara is the country's largest single bog and comes with a clutch of stories about strange creatures in its dark waters. In a communication to our columnist Dr Karl Shuker this month, the Serbian cryptozoologist Marko Sciban tells of a recent investigation into two sightings – one from a sailor who heard "smashing sounds accompanied by loud bubbling and croaking", and the other from the nature park supervisor who was so frightened he fired shots over the water – both apparently describing "a squid-like tentacled monster". **FT150:21**

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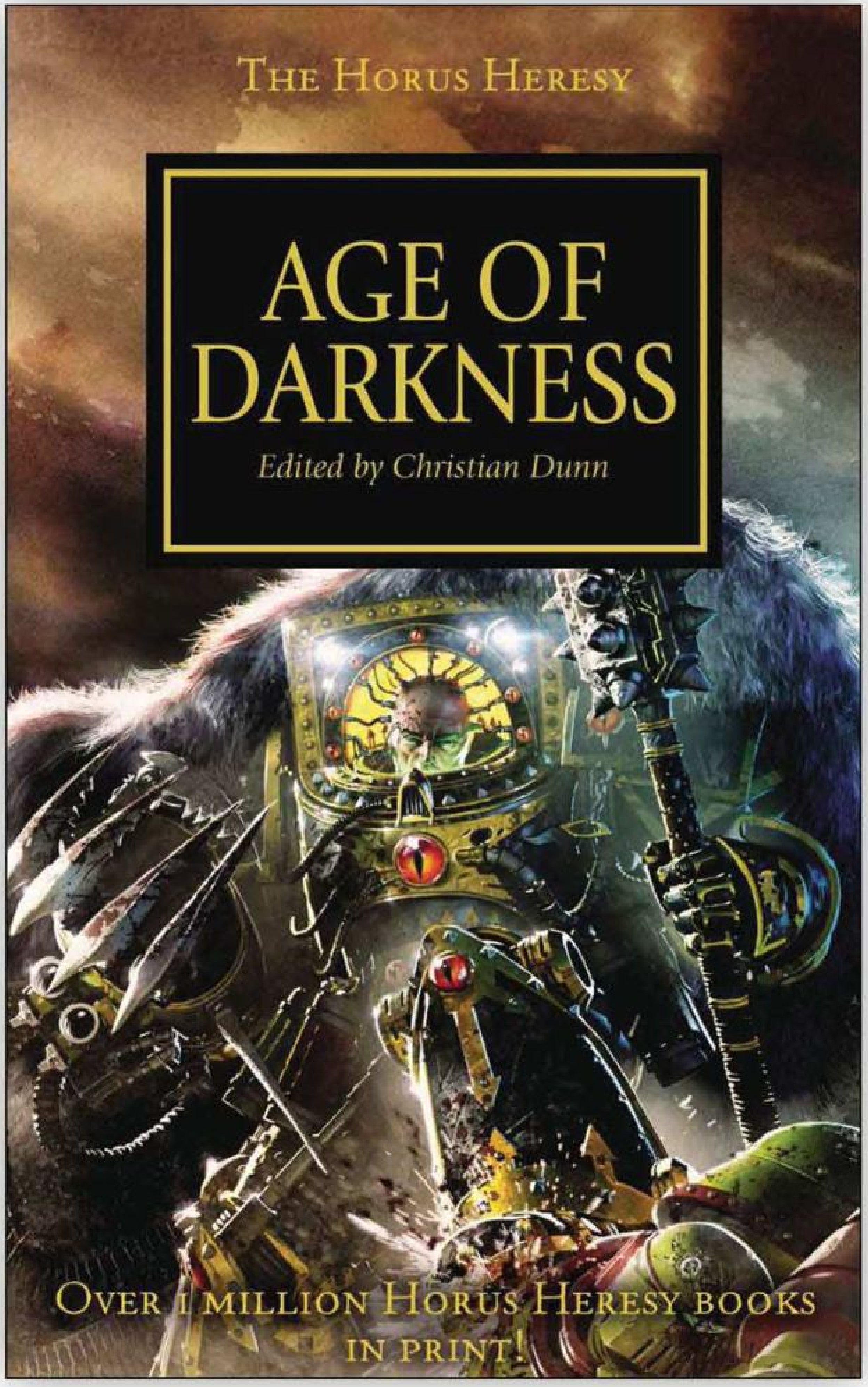
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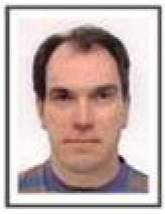

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